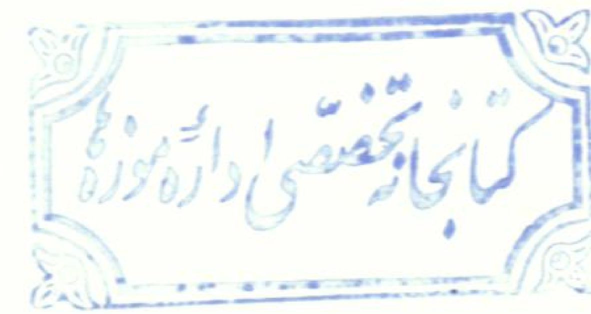
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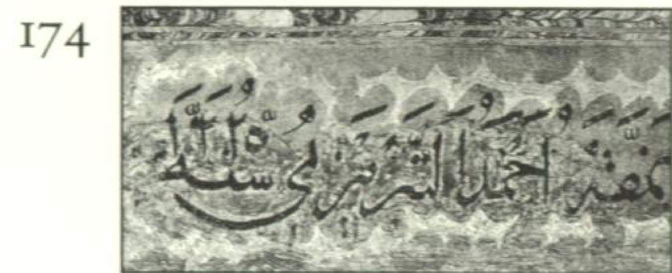
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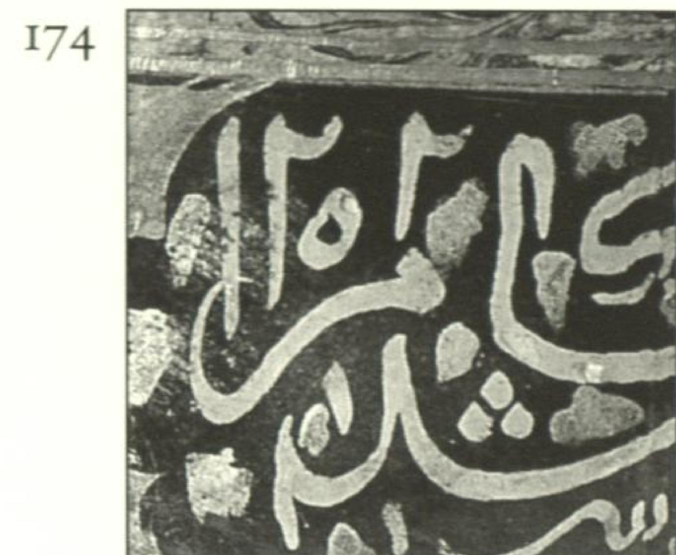
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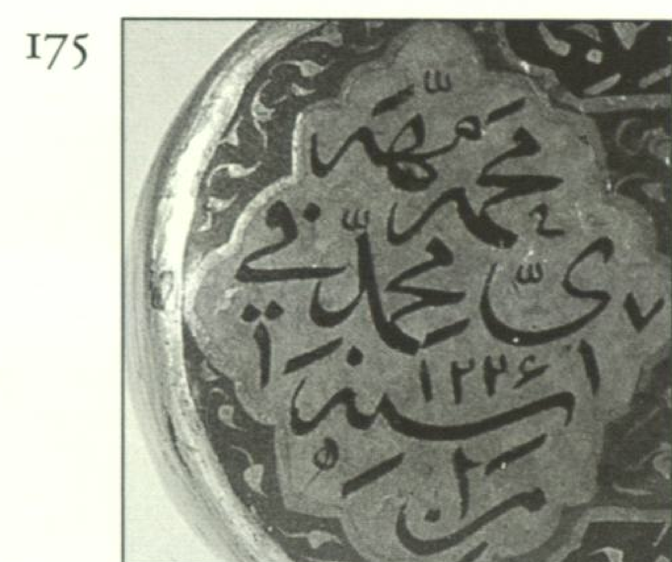
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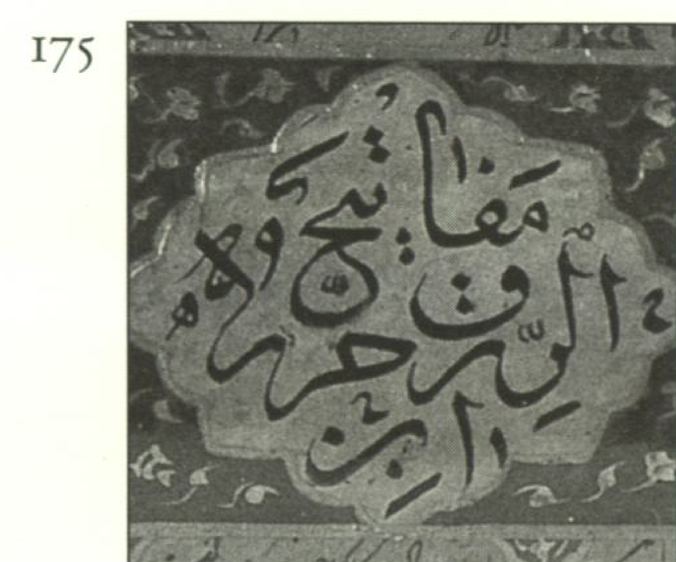
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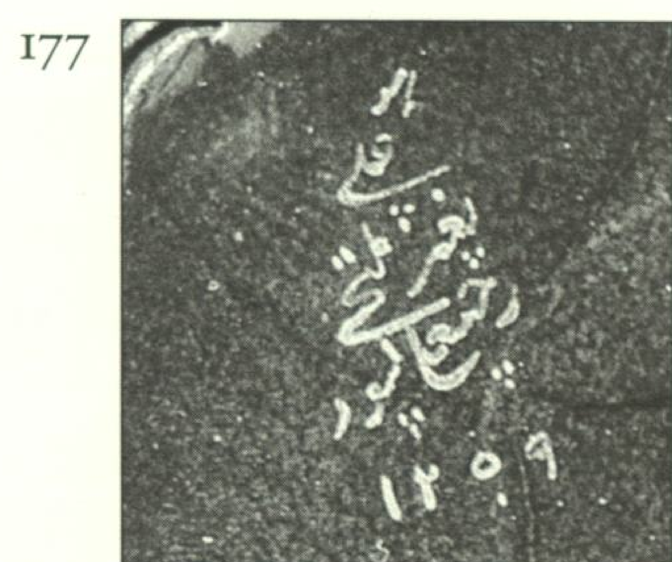
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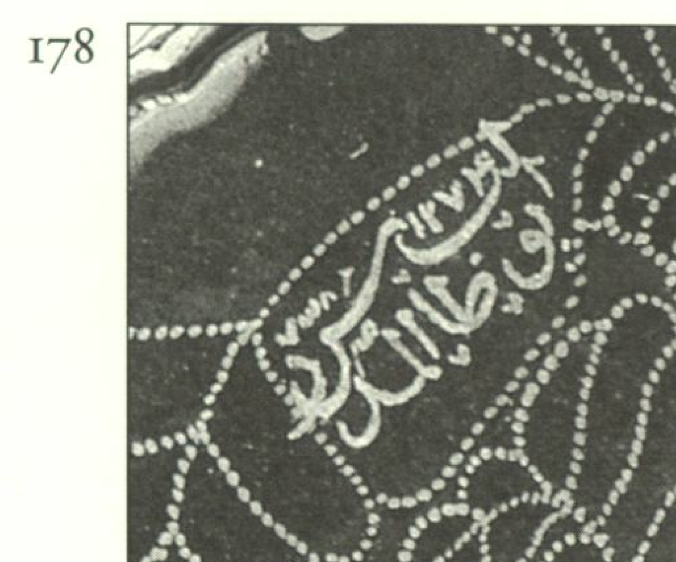
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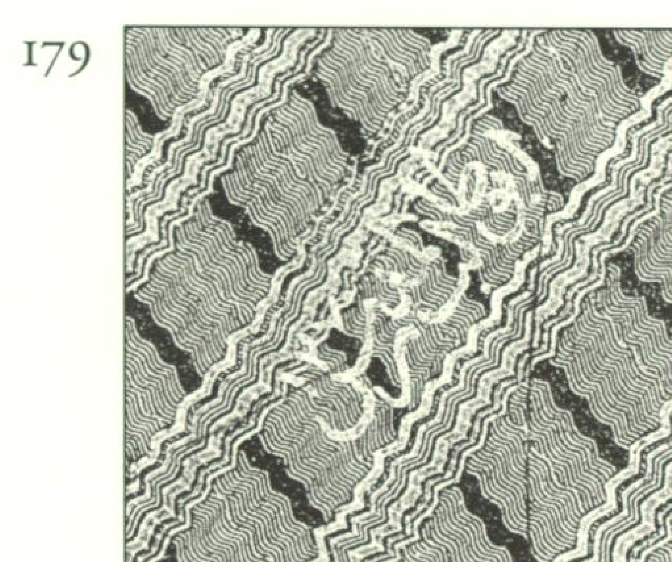
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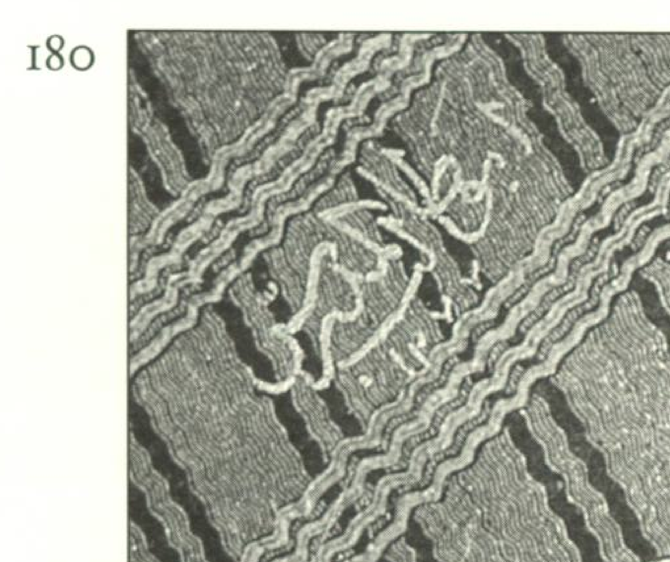
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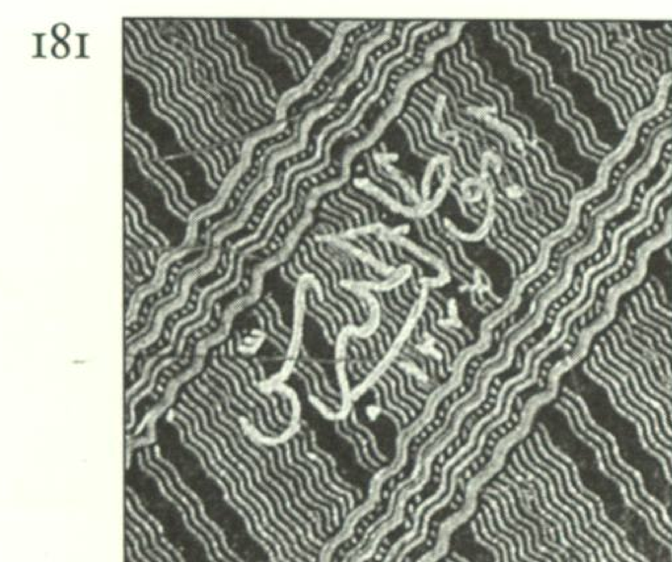
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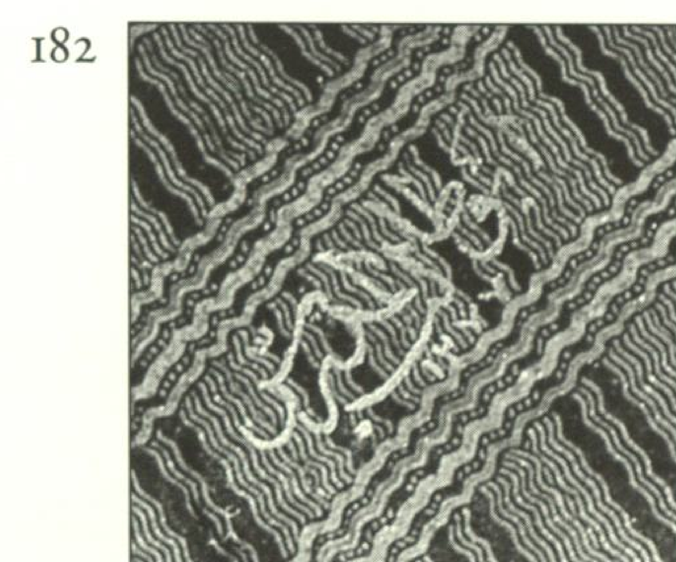
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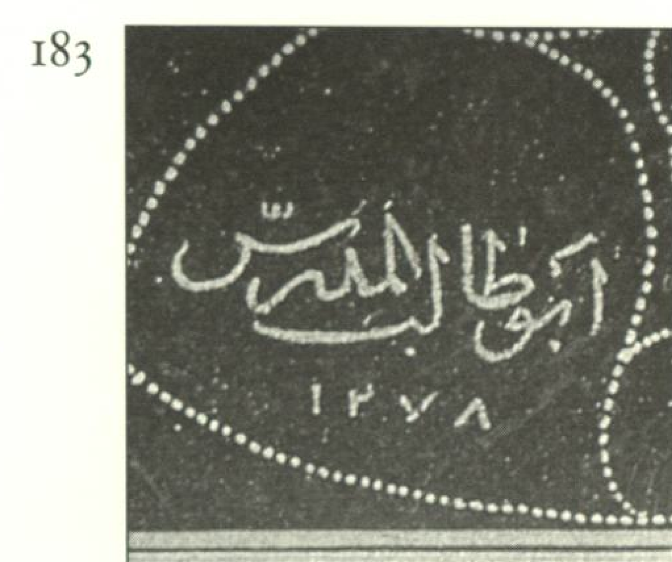
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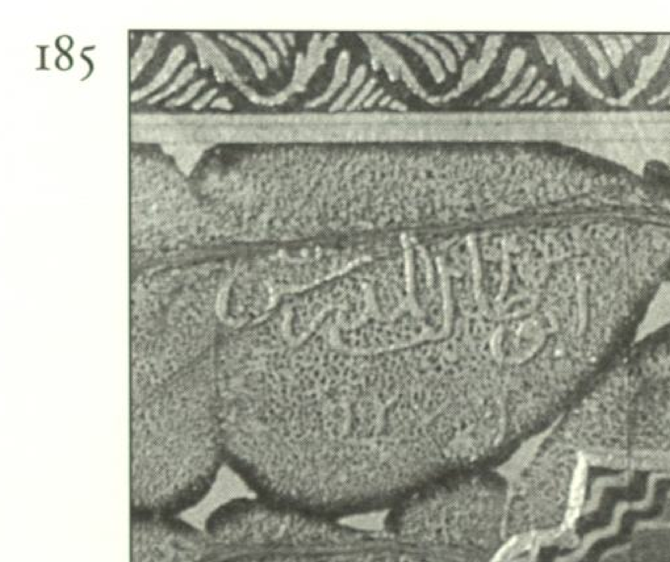
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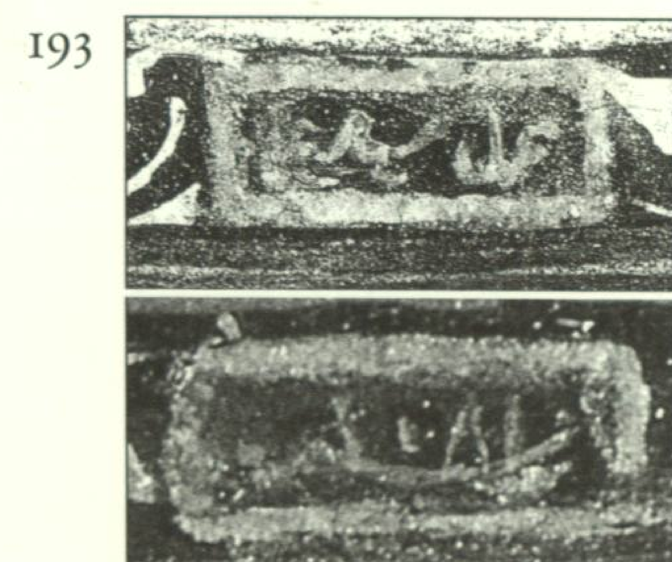
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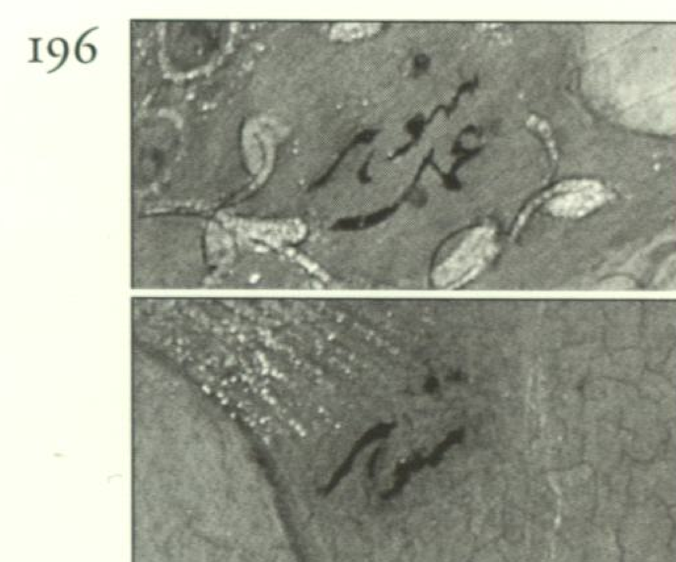
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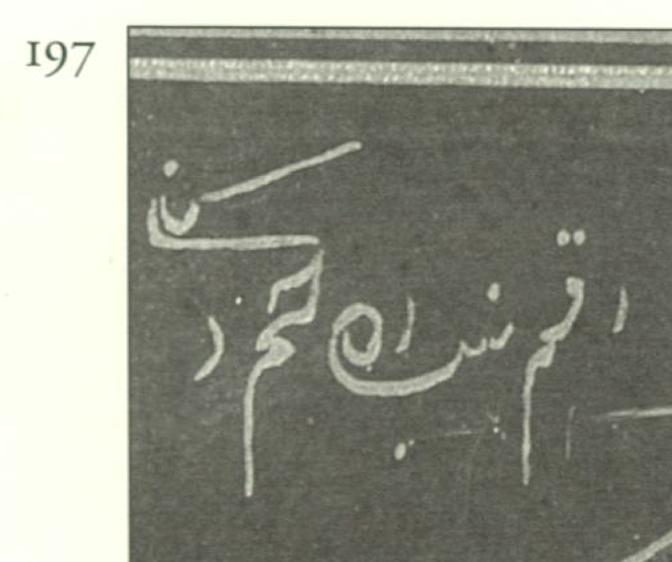
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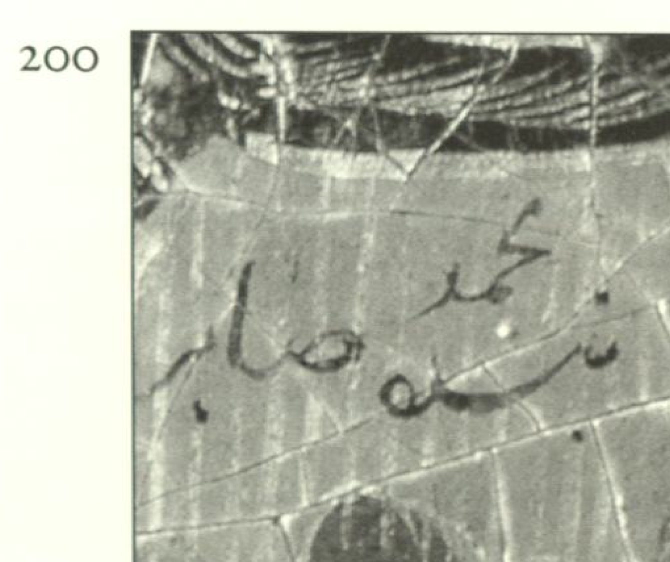
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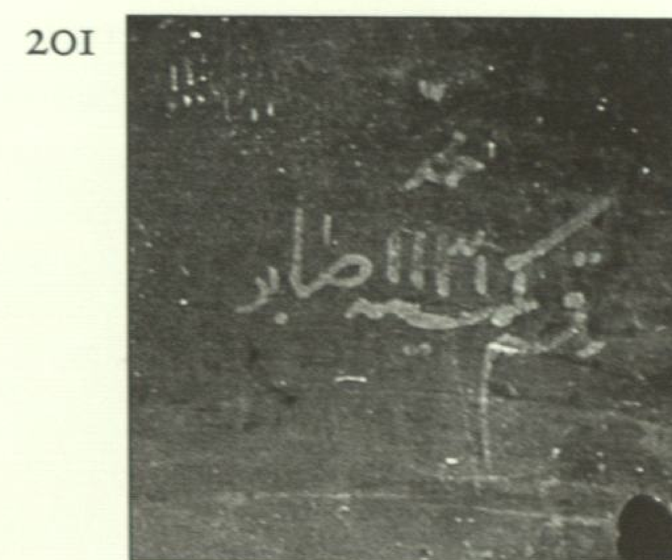
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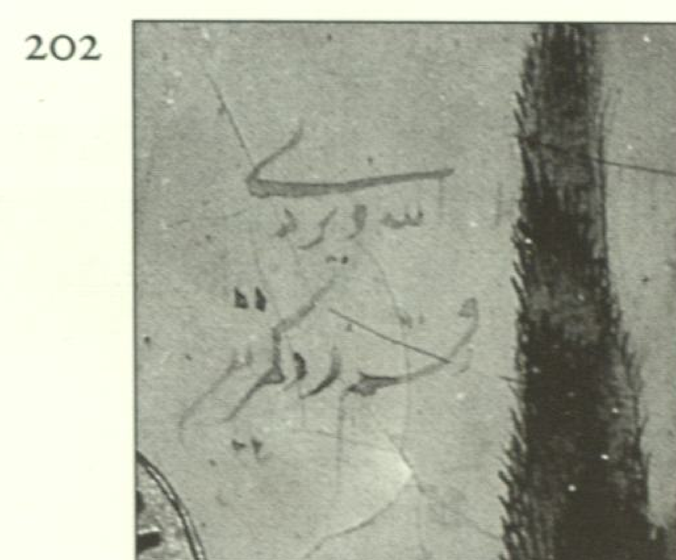
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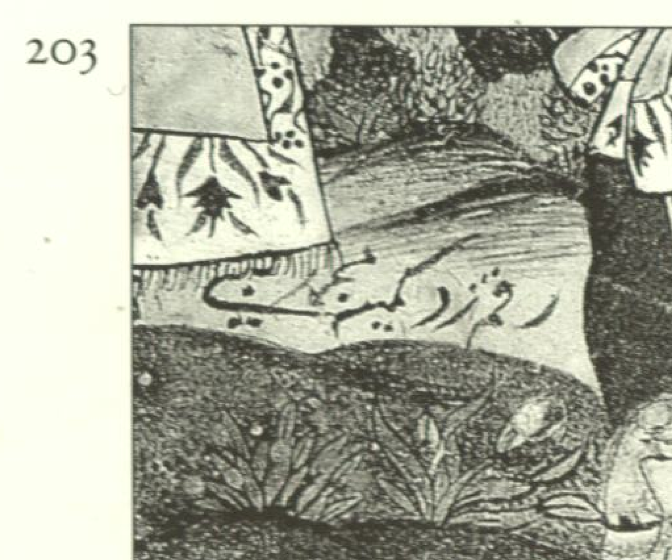
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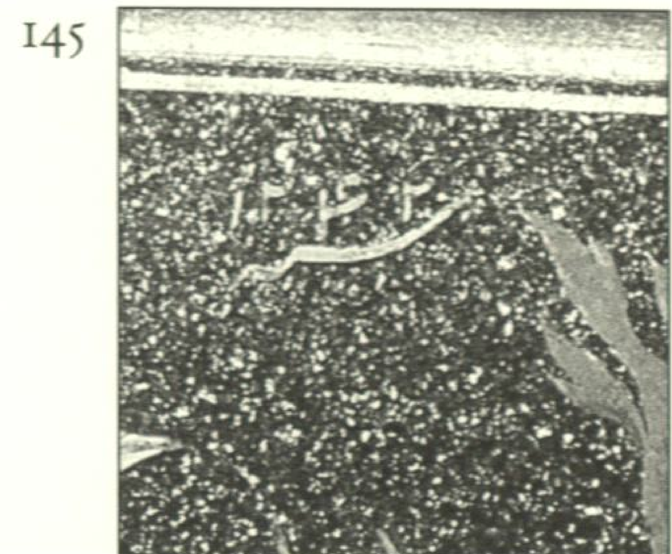


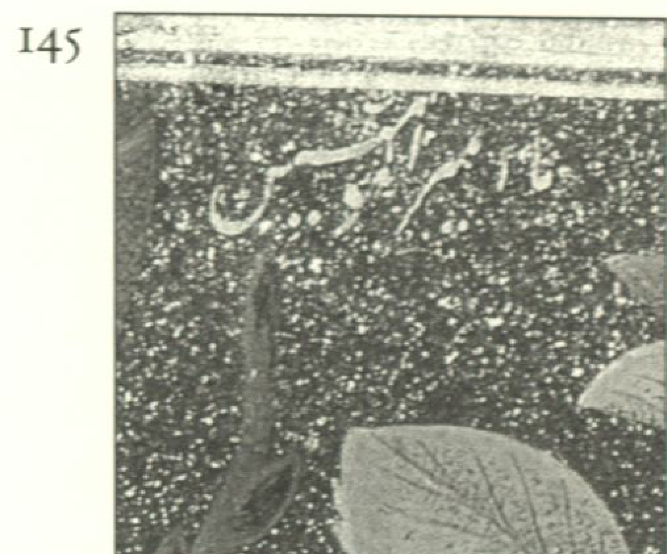
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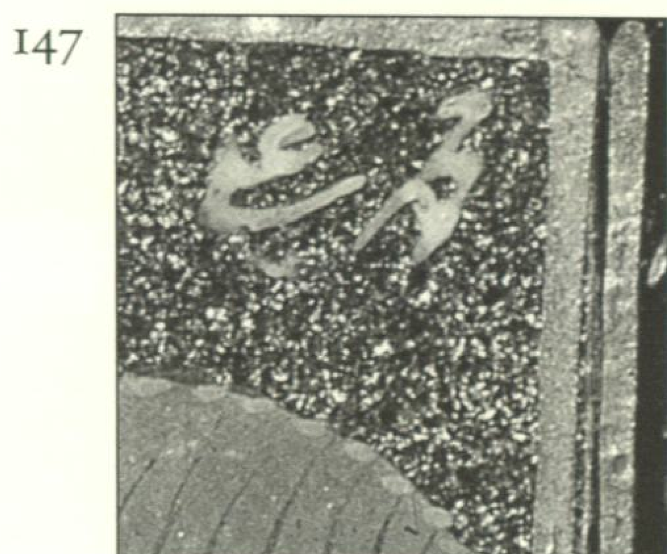
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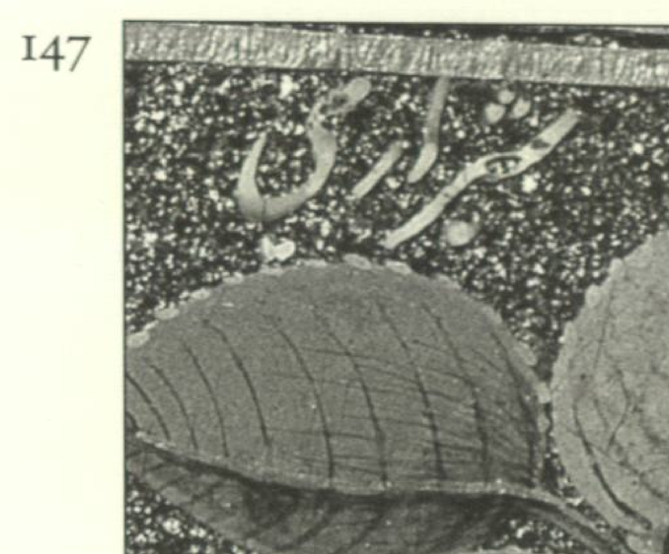


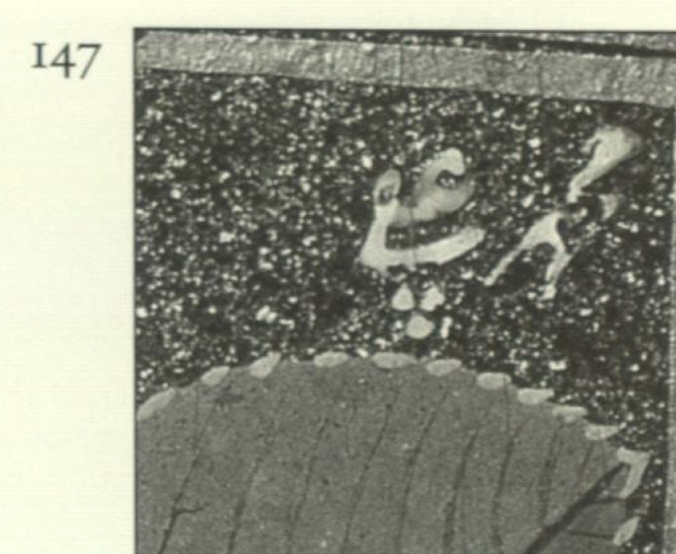
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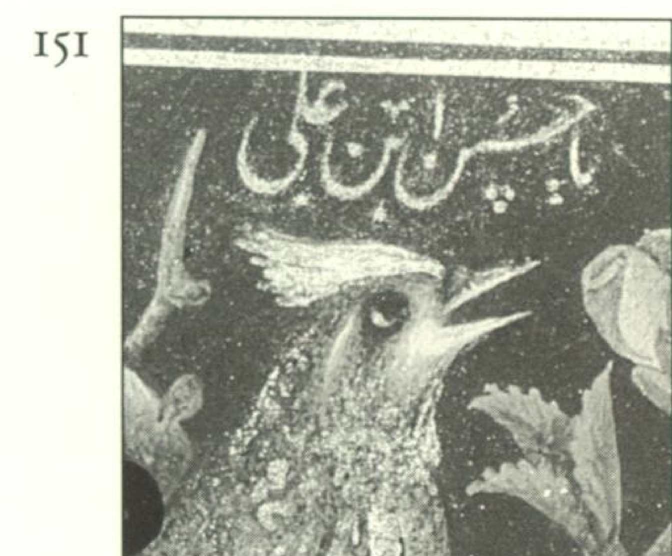
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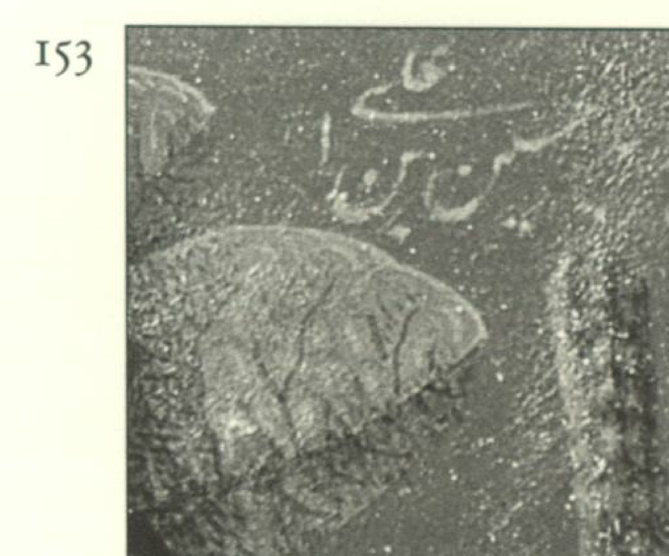

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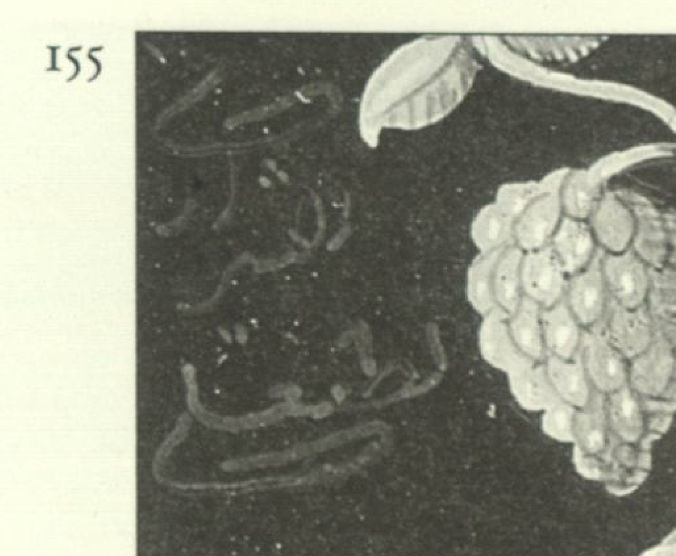
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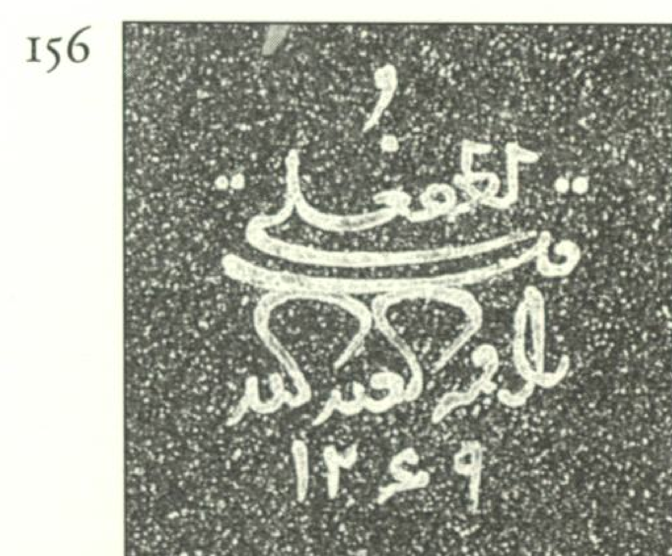
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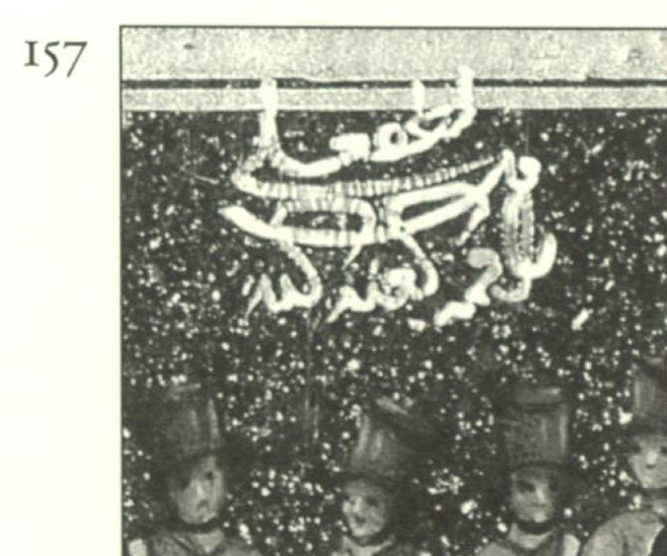
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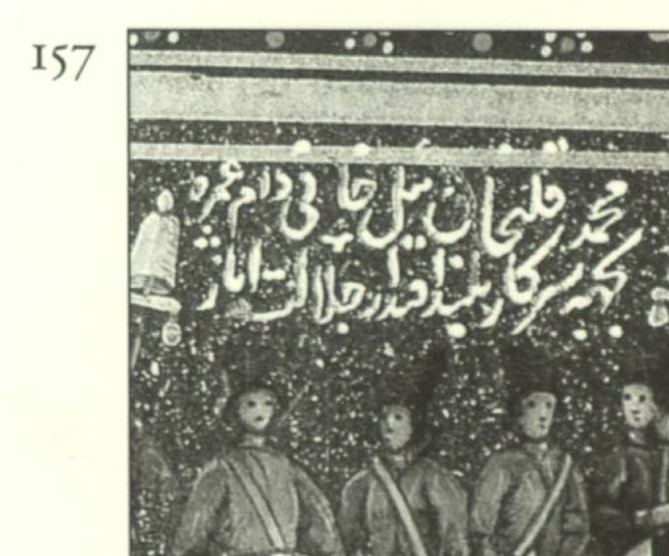
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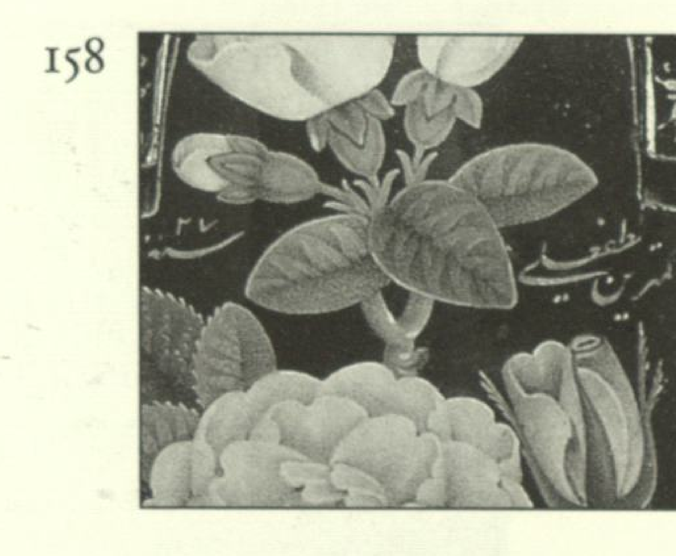

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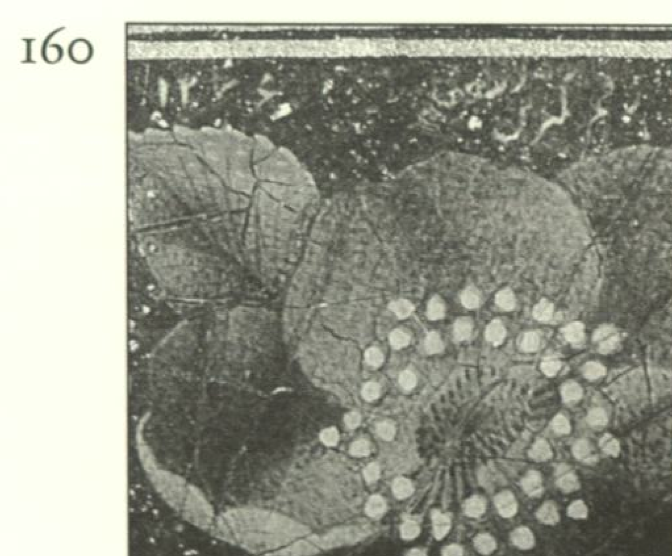
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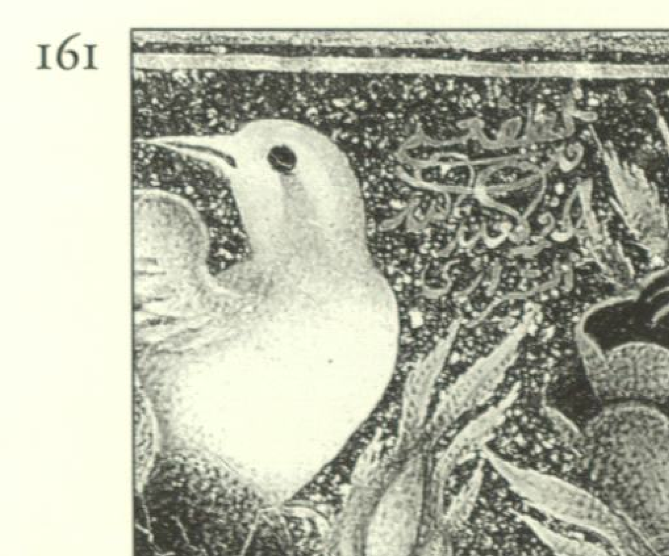
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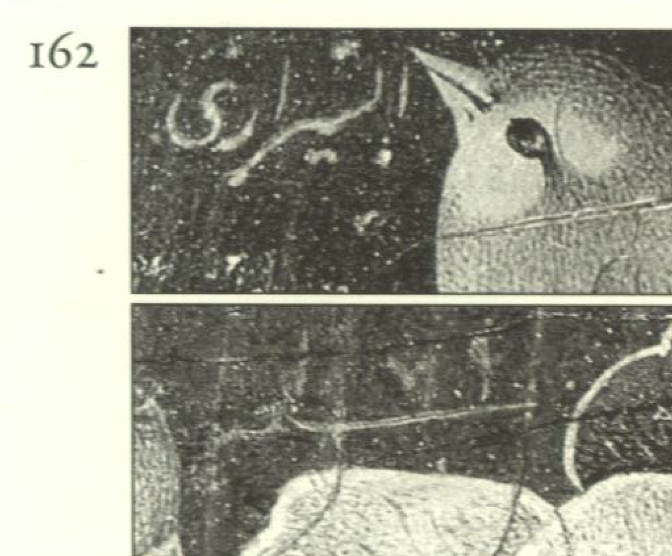
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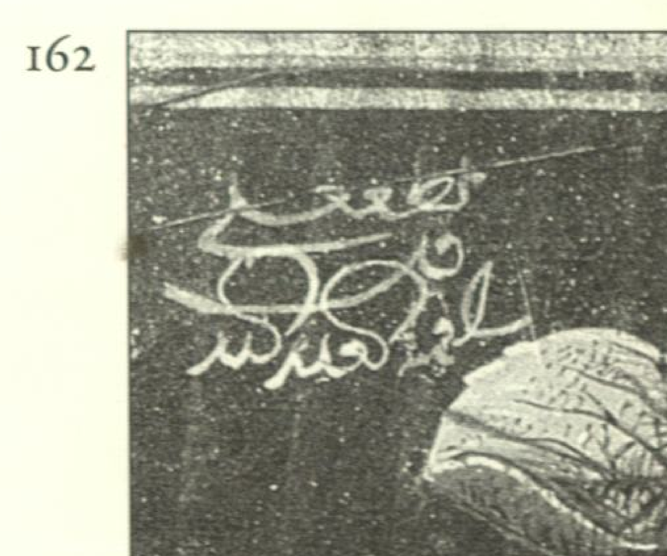
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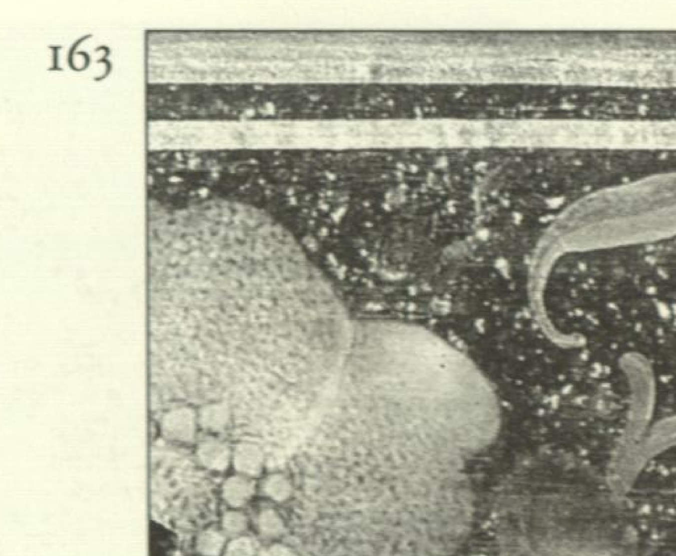
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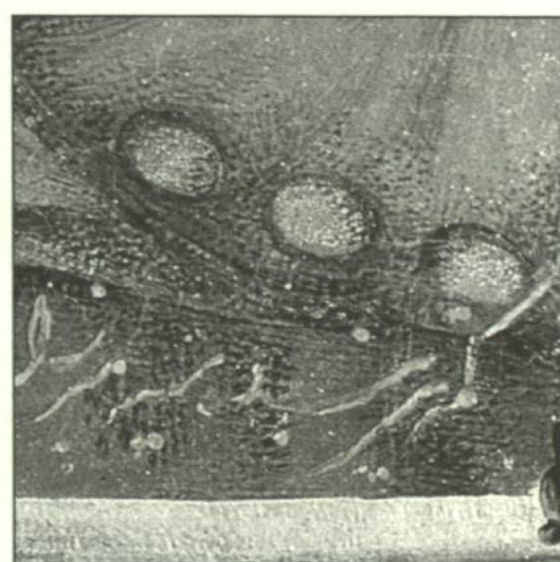
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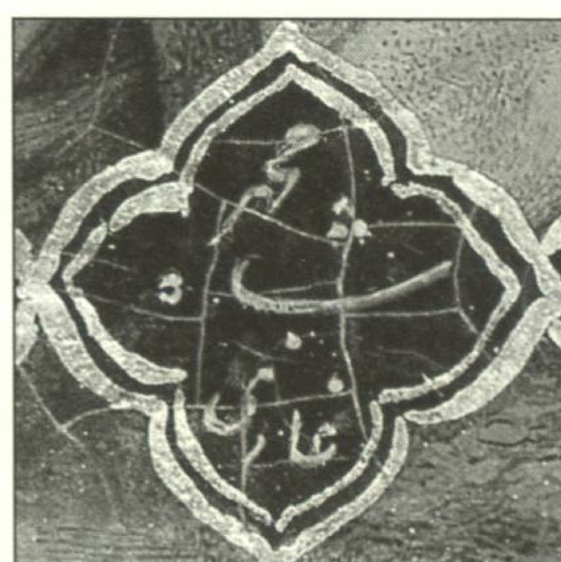
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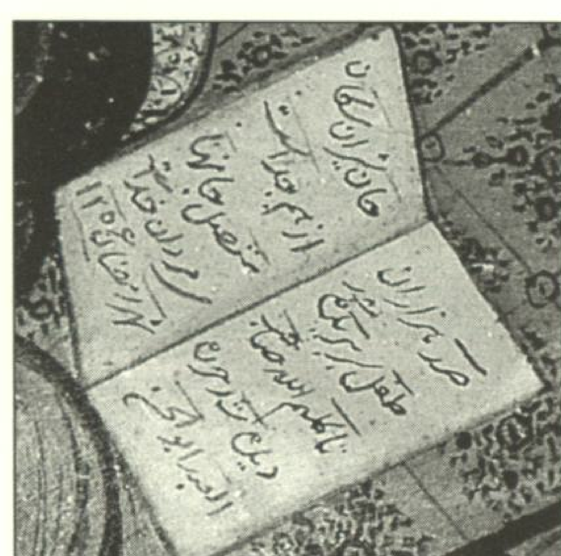
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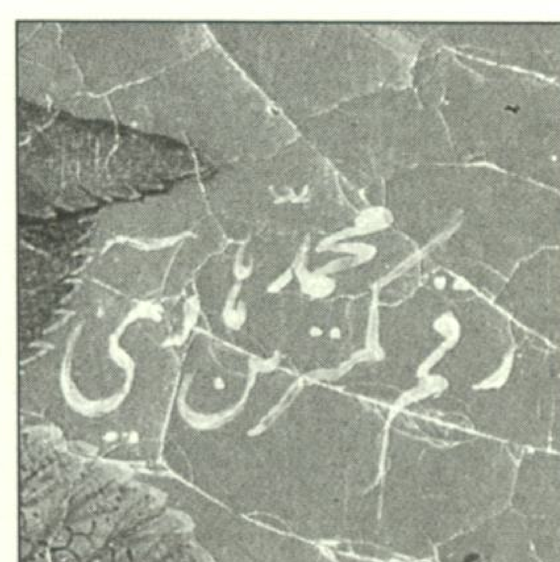
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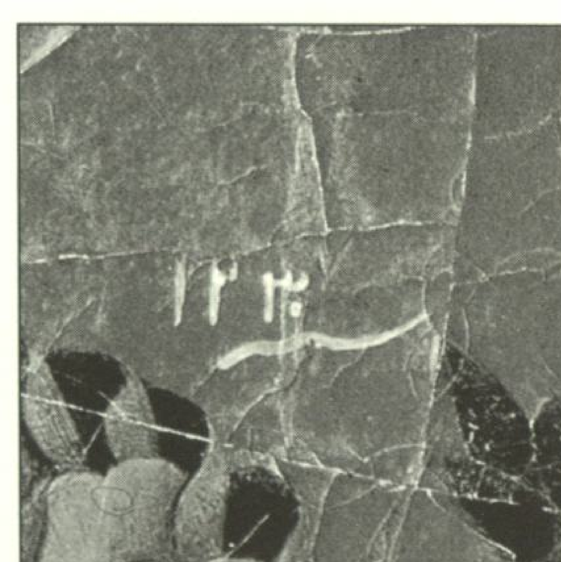
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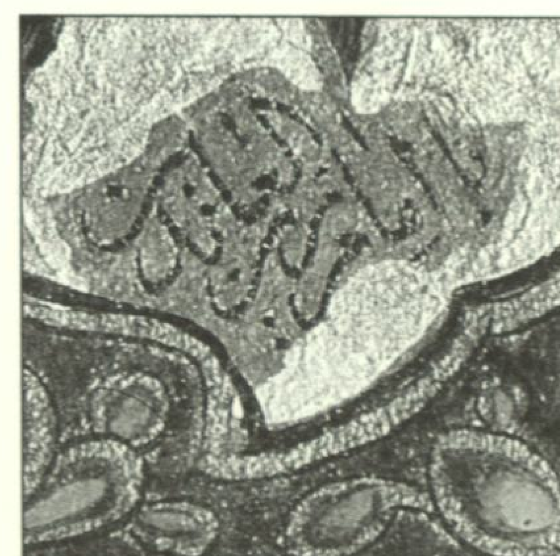
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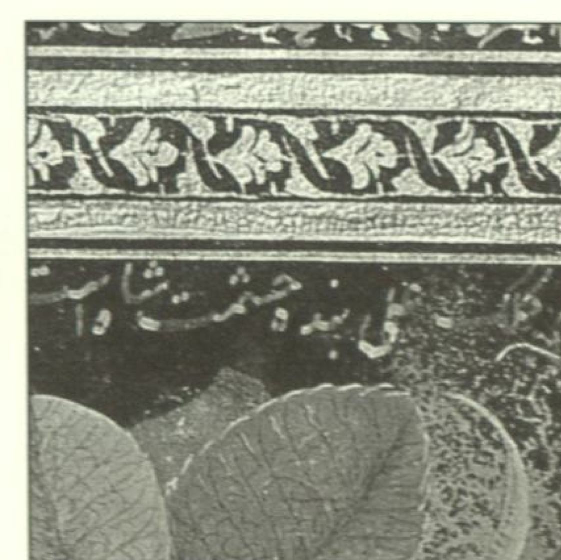
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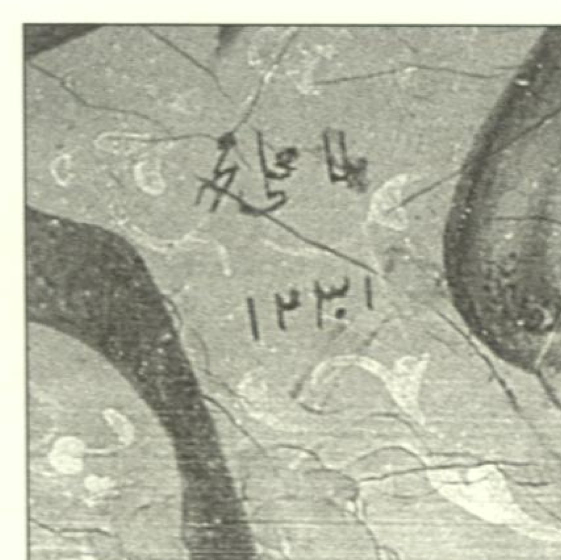
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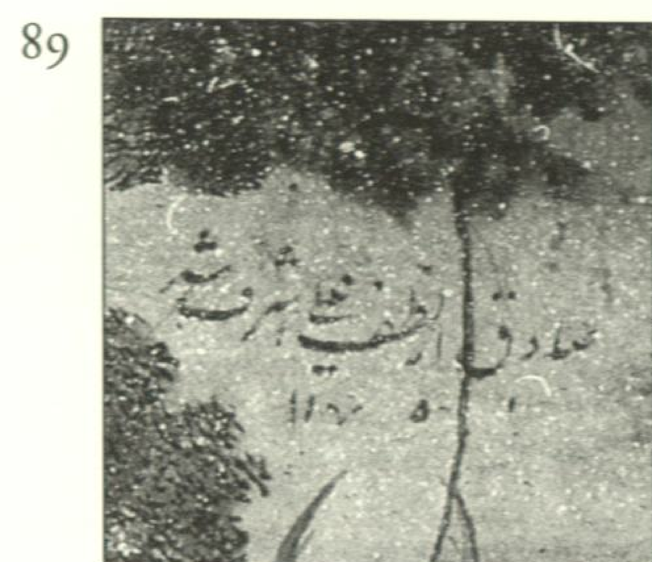
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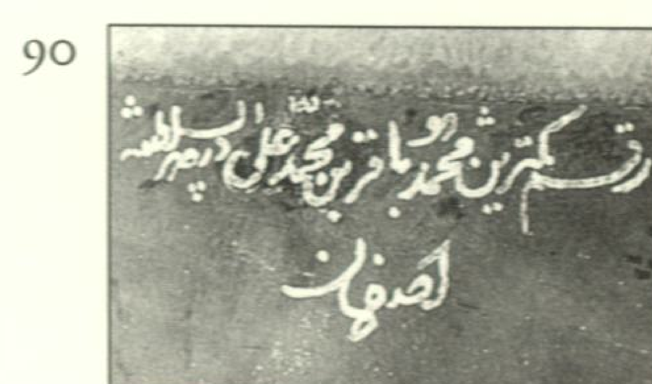
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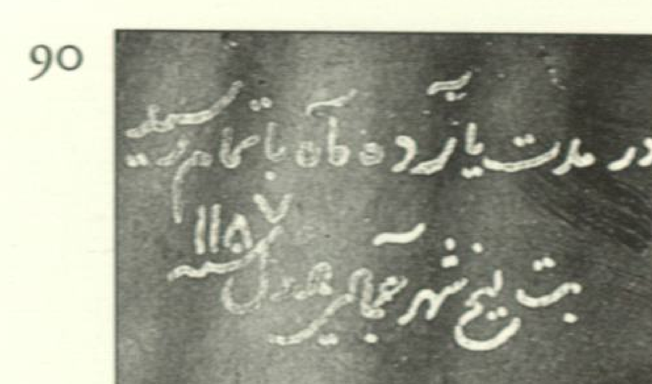
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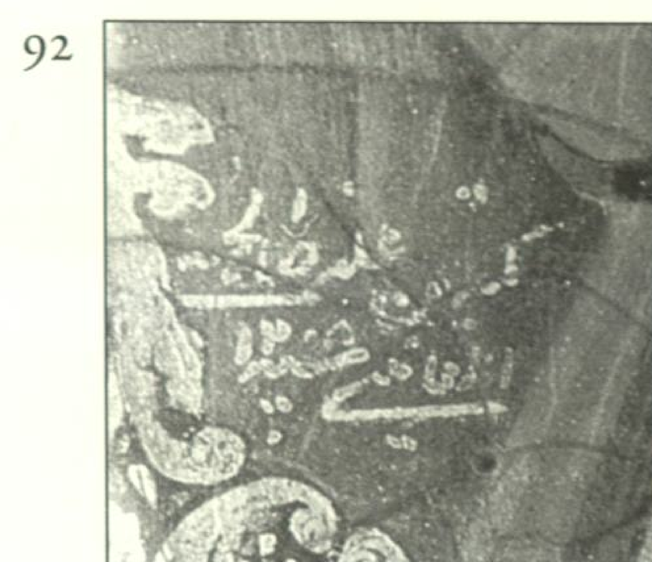
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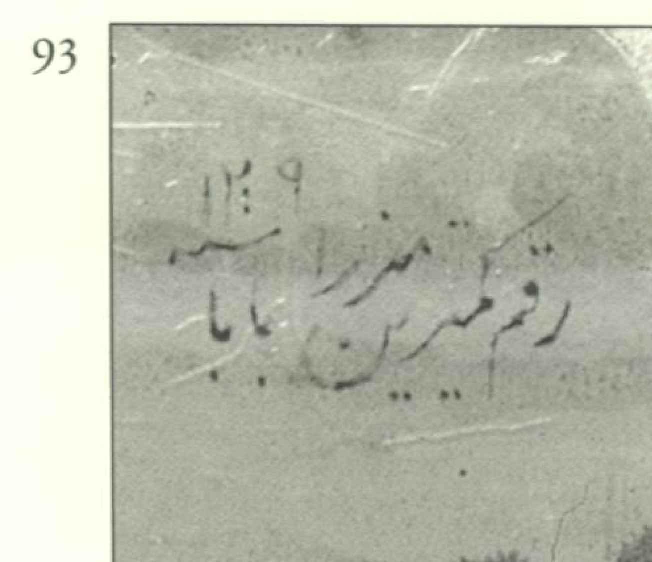
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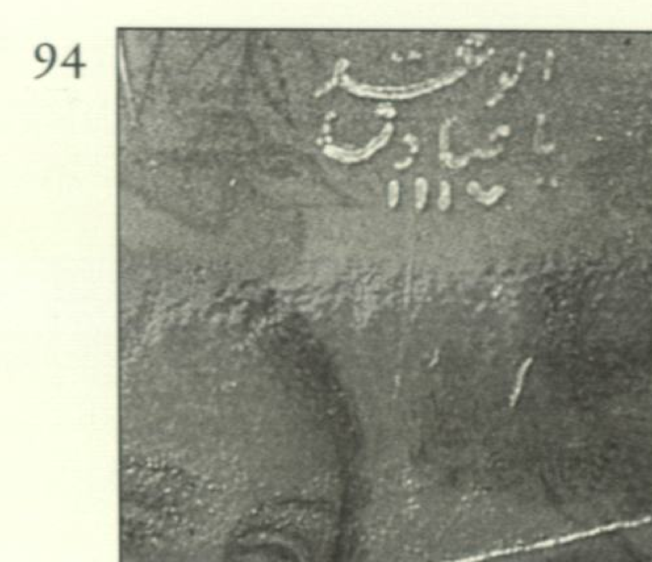
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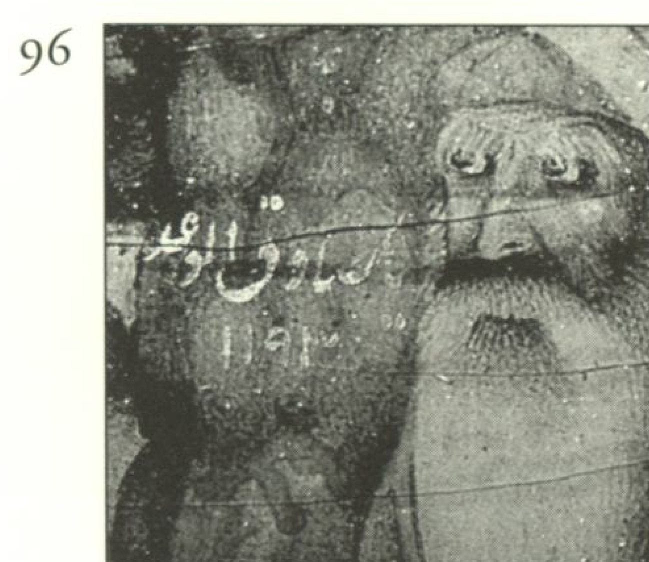
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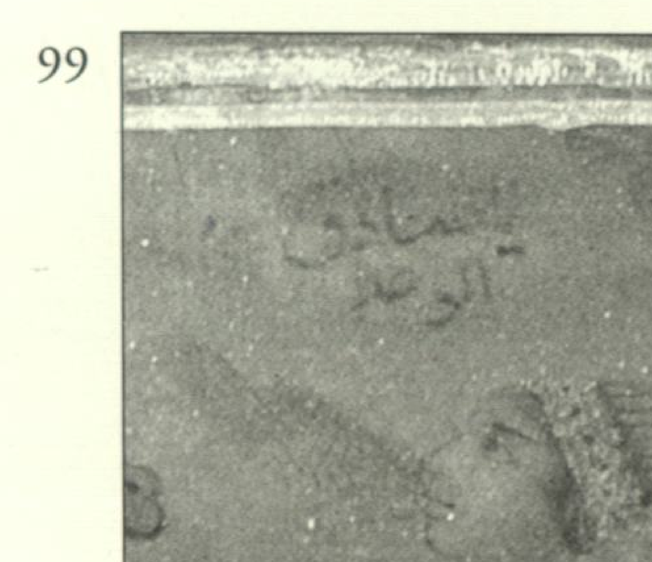
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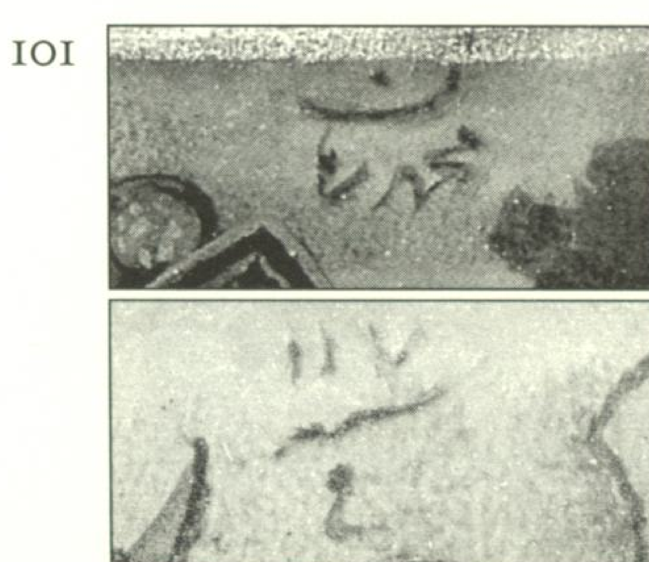
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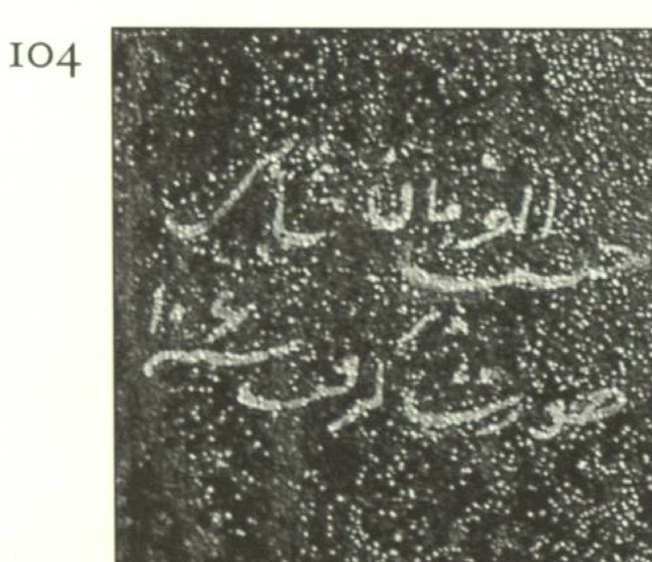
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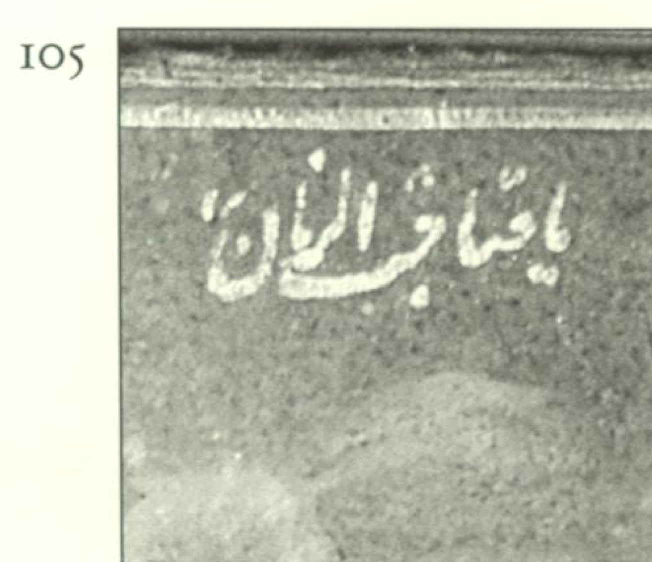
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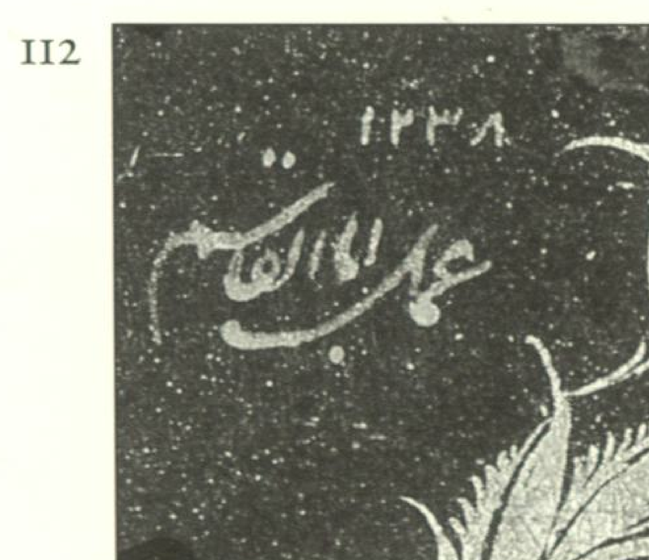
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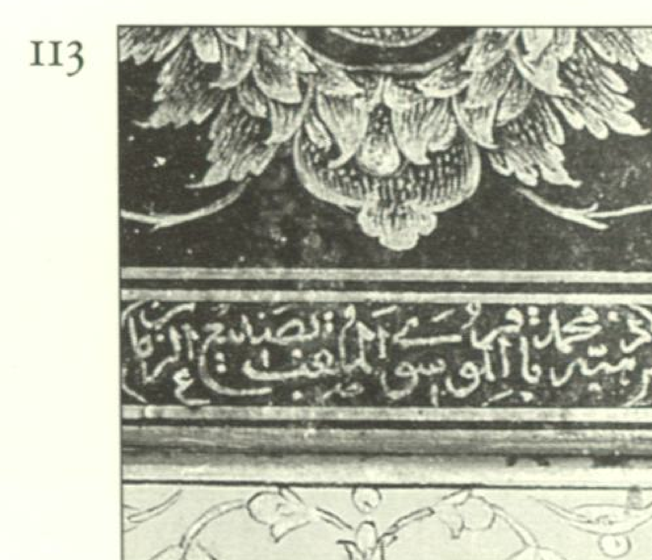
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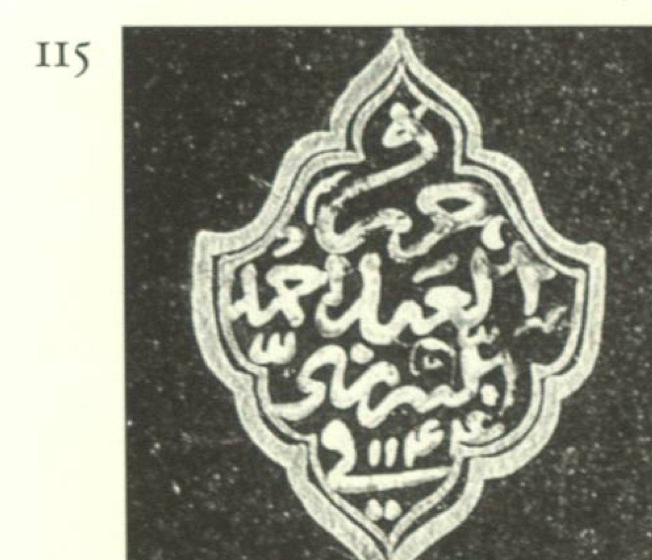
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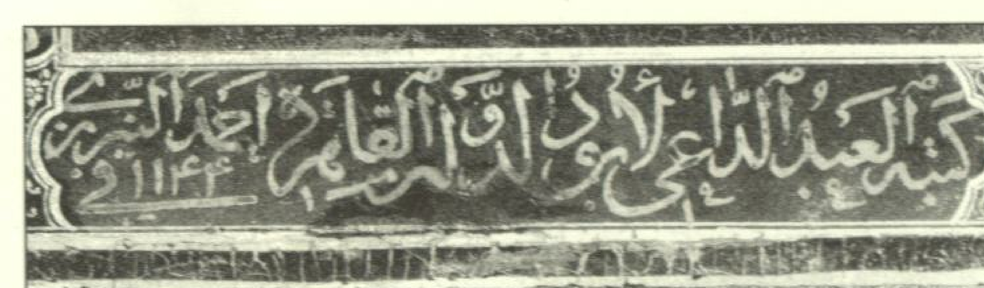


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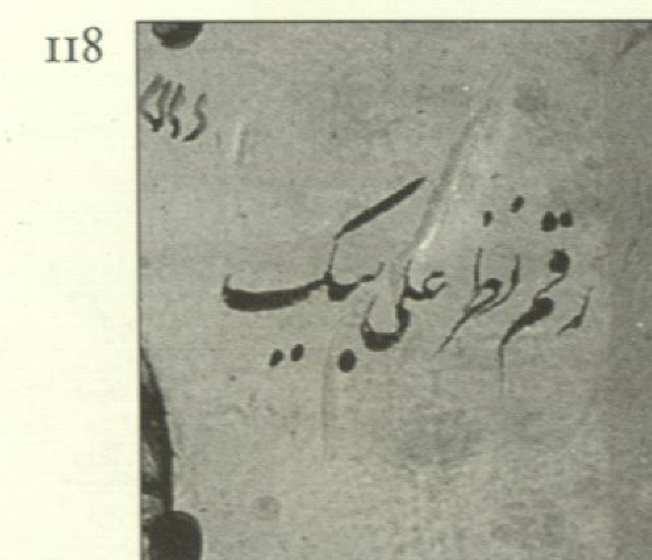
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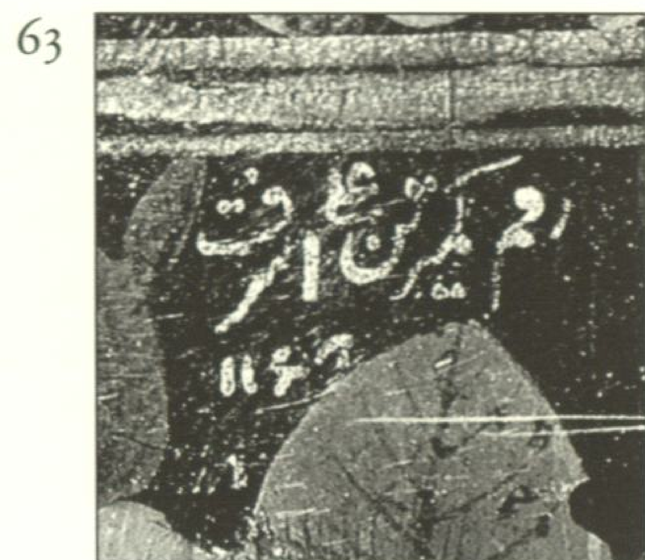
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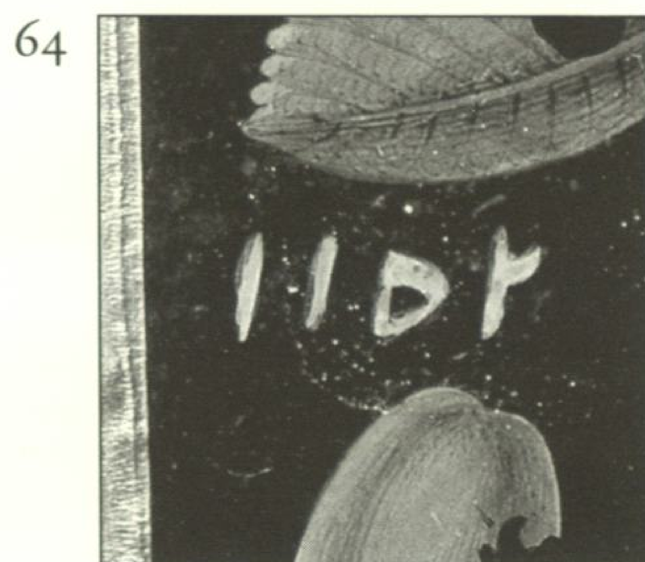
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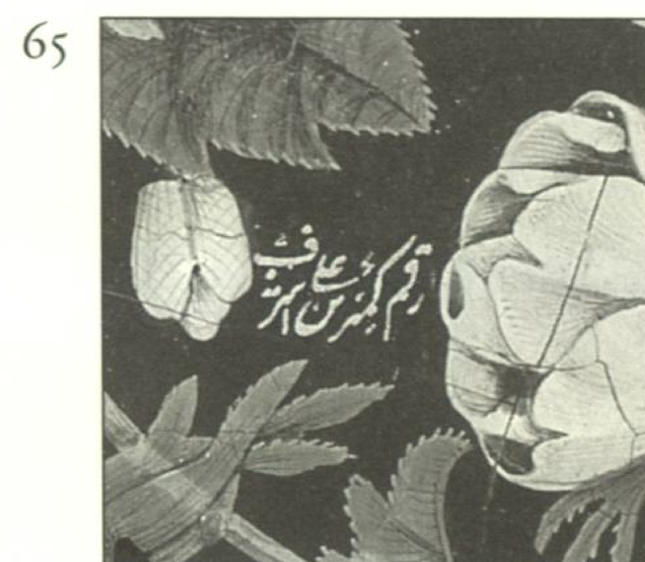
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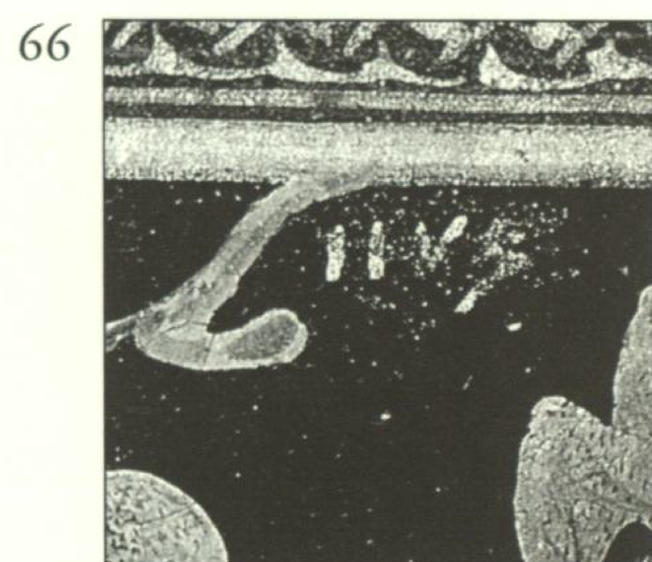
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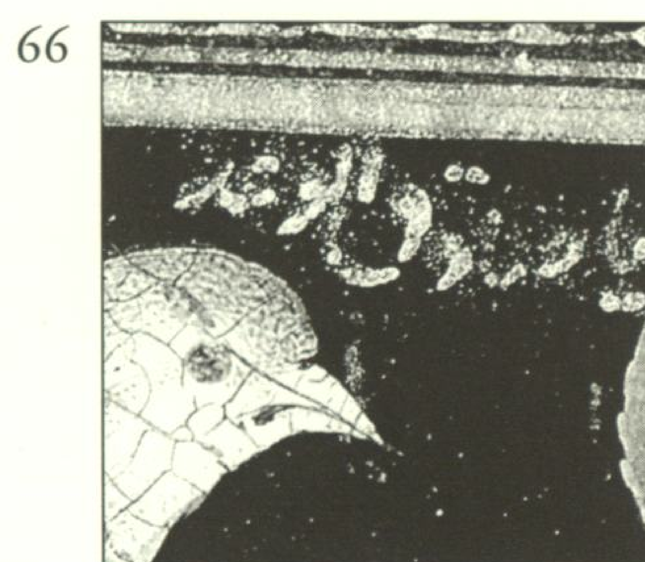
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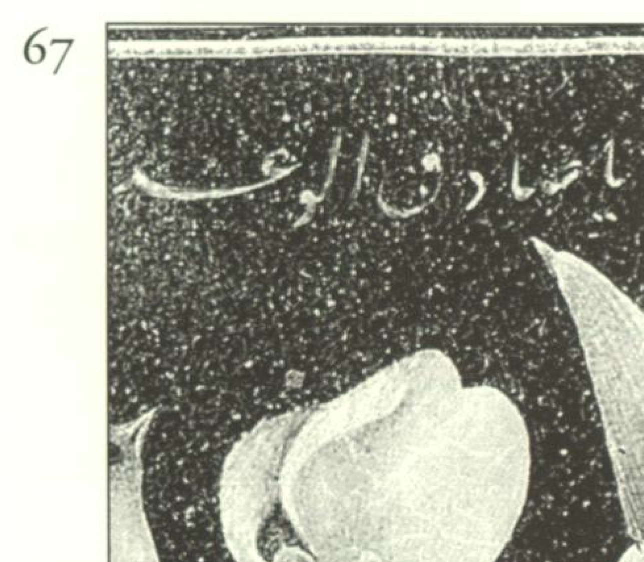
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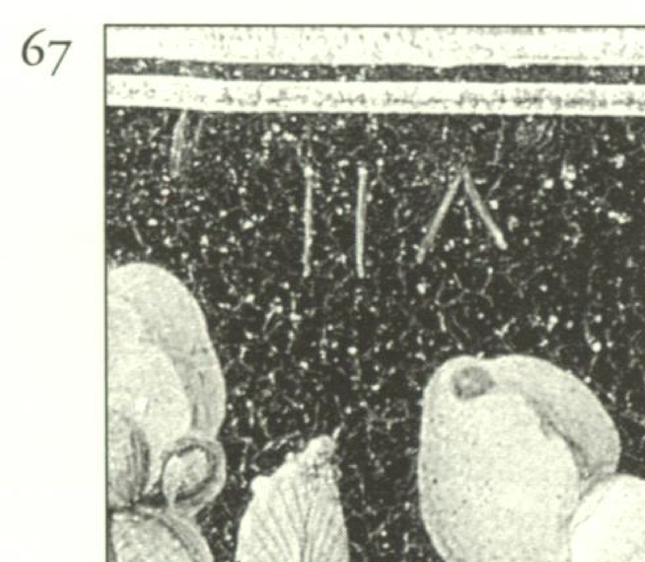
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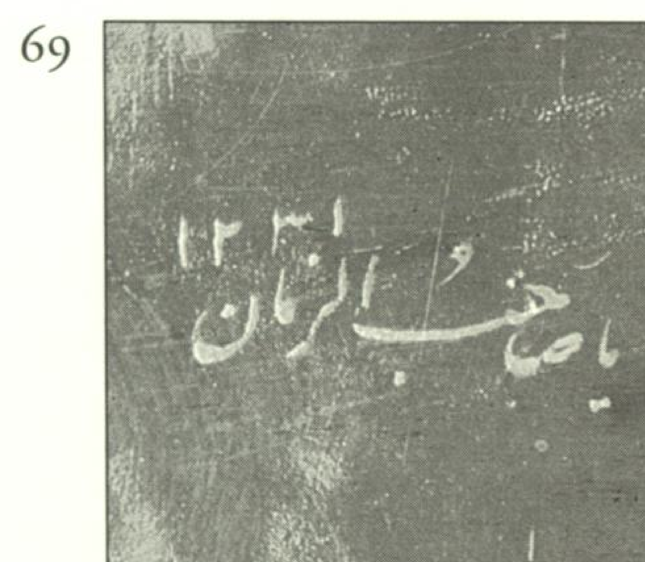
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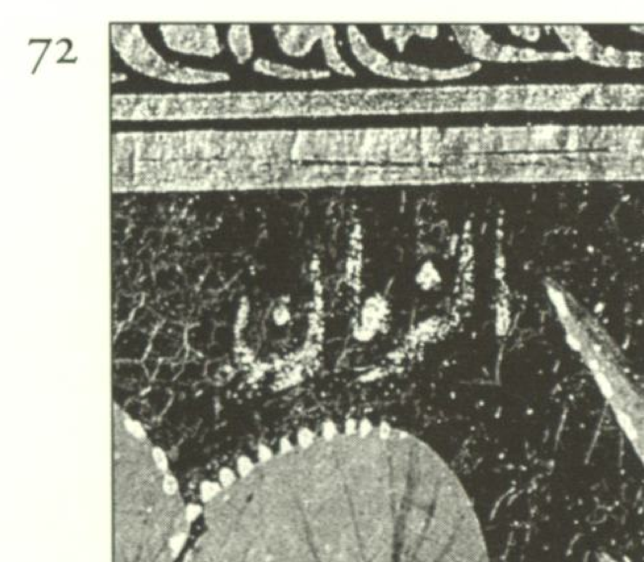
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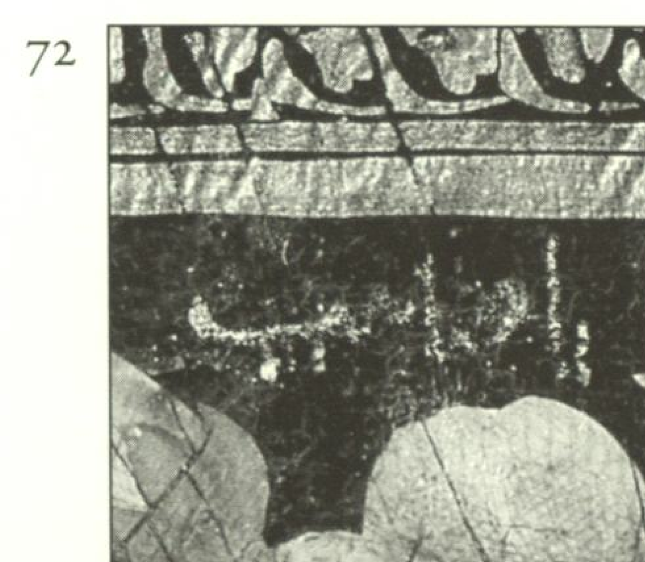
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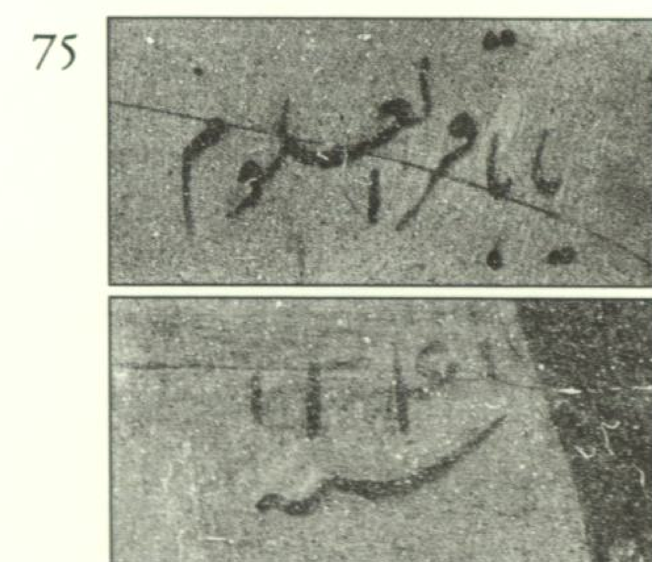
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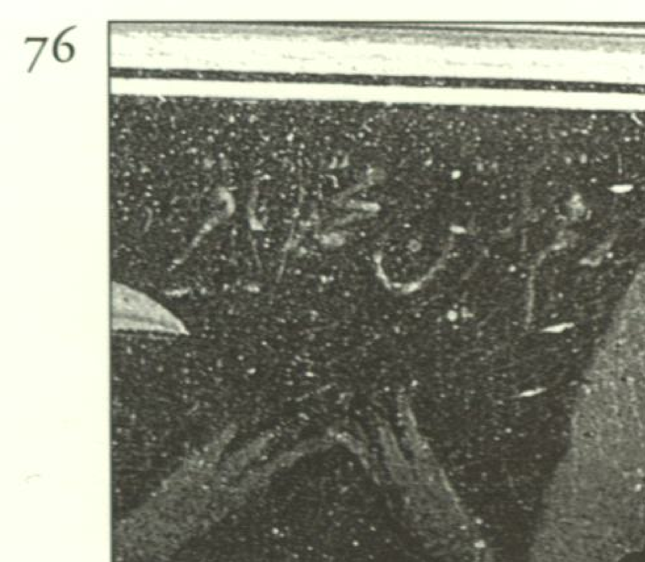
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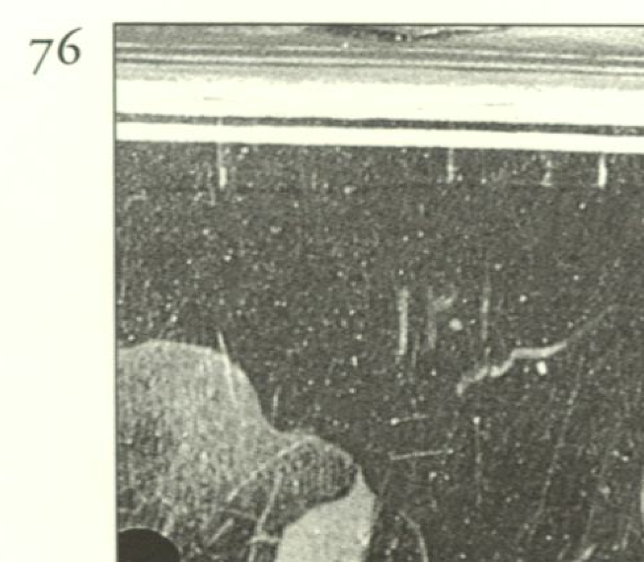
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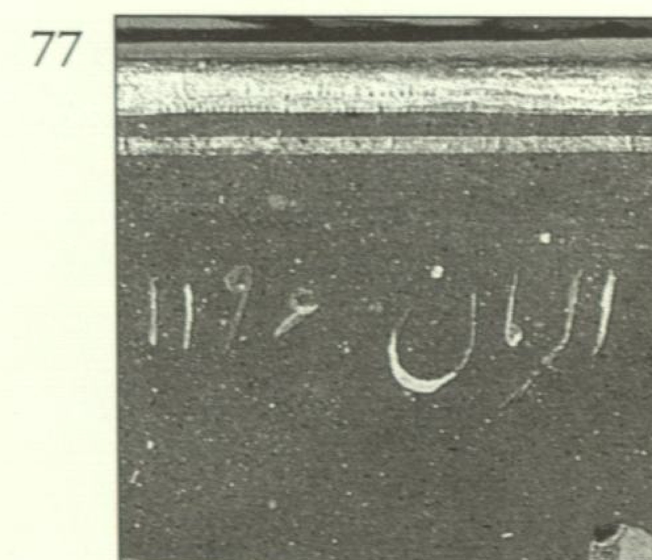
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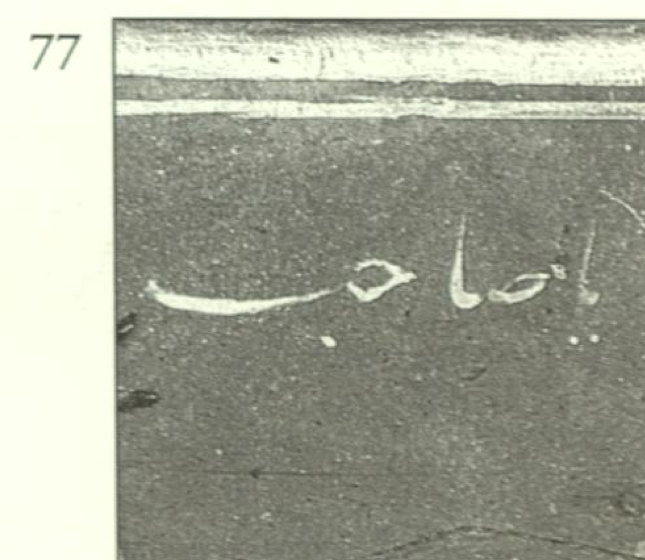
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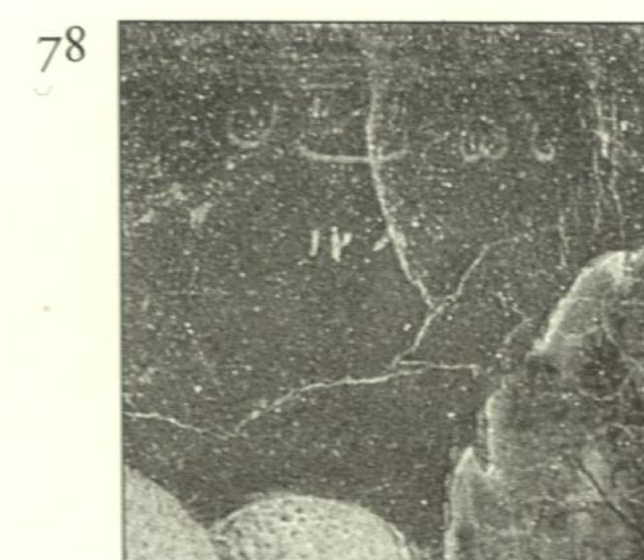
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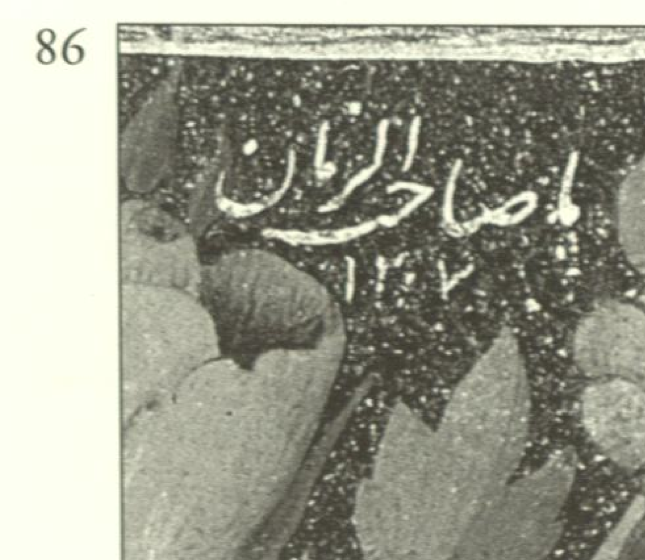
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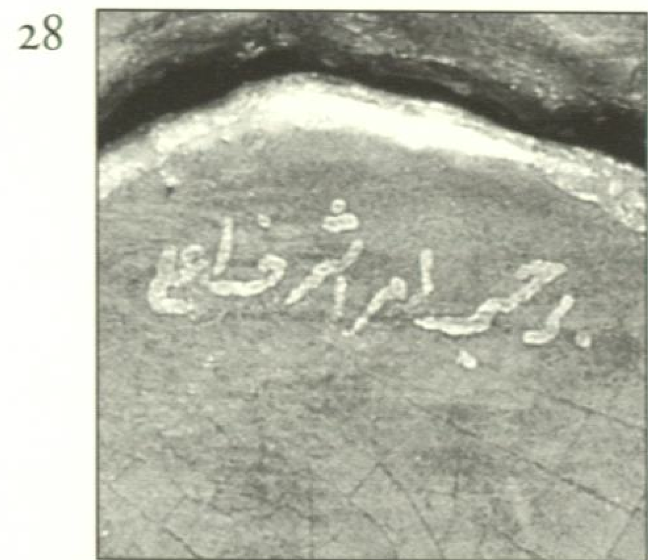
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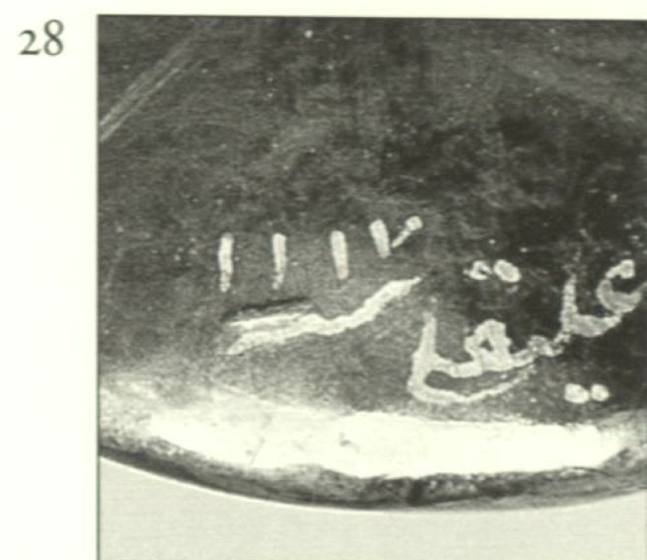
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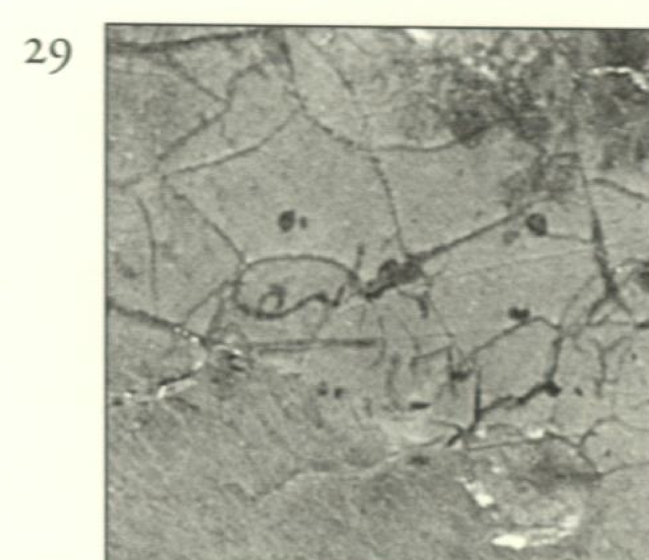
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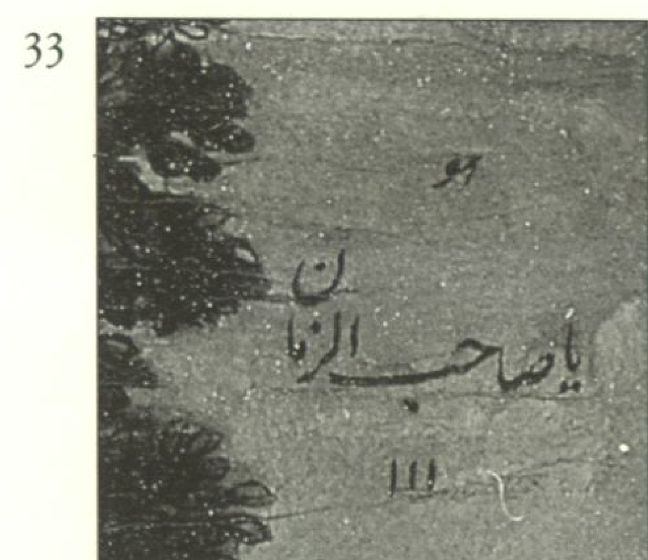
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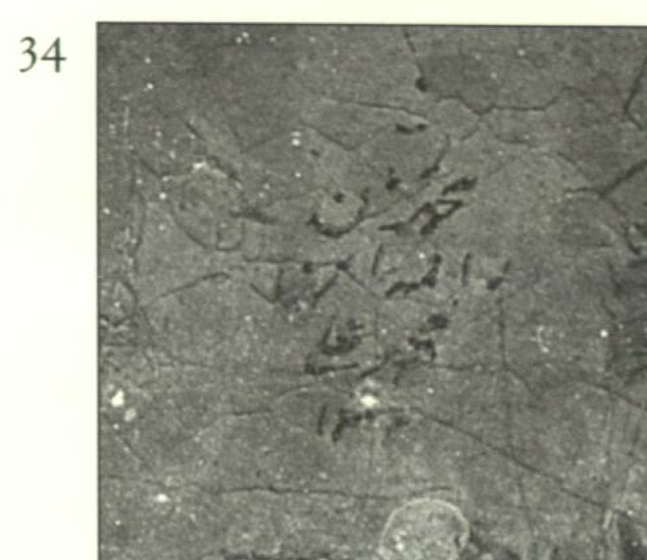
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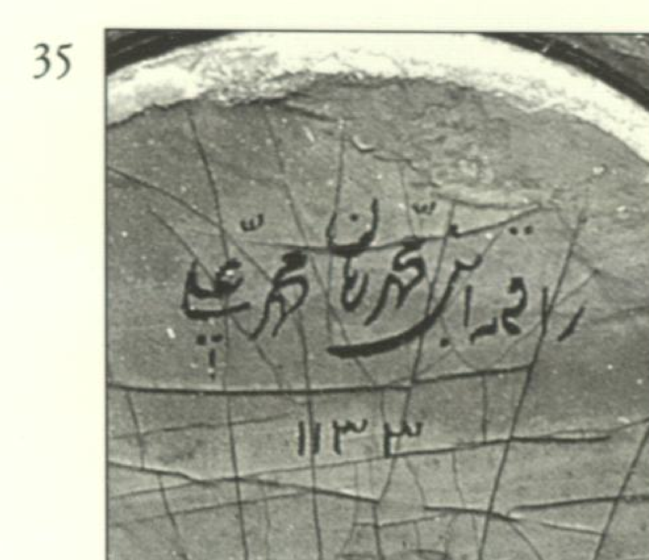
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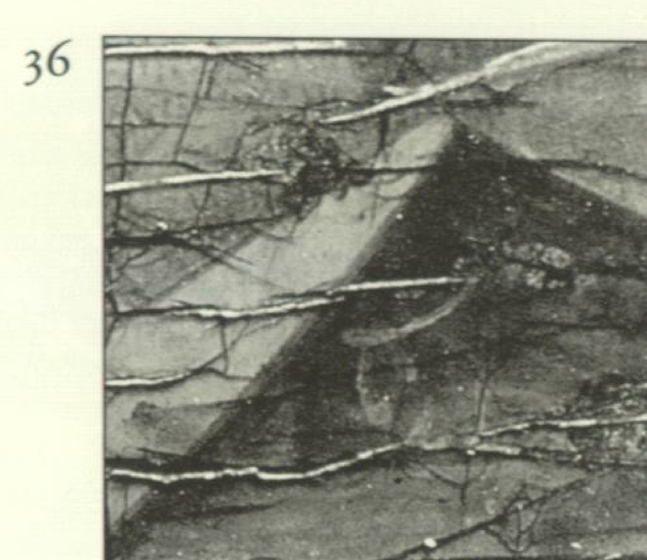
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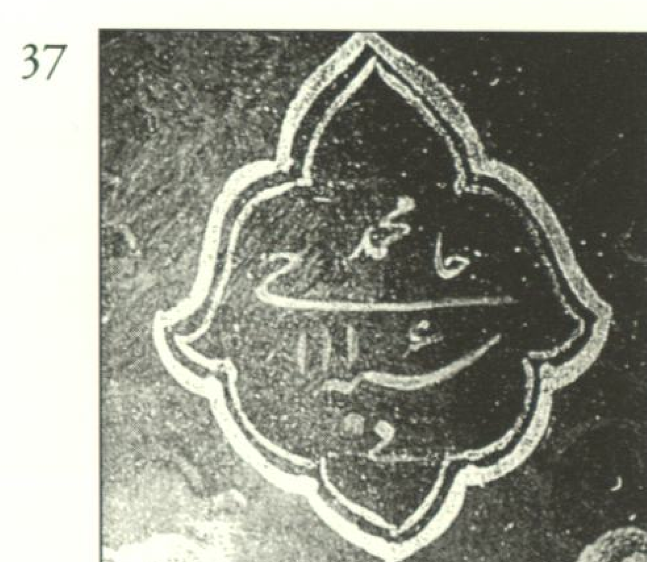
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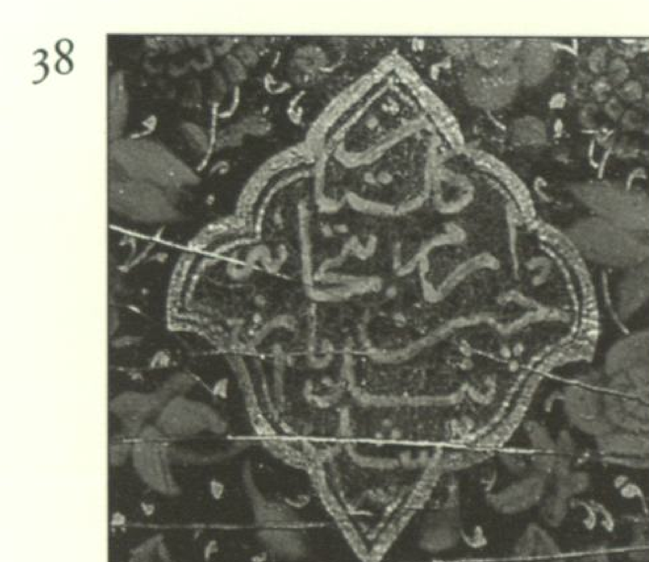
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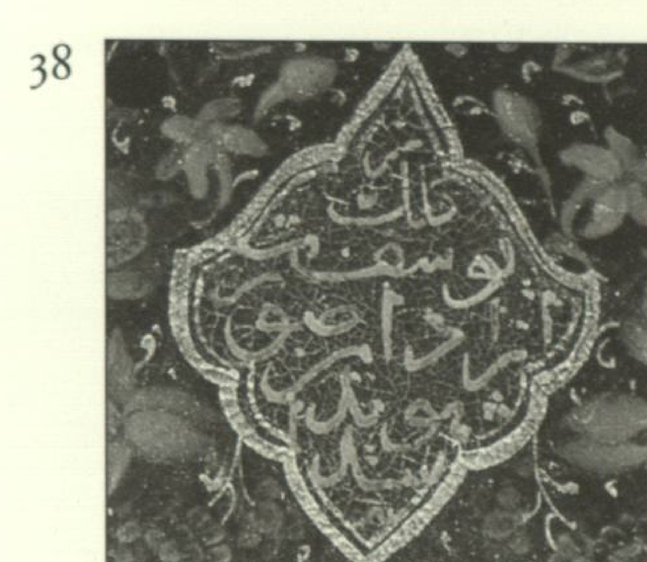
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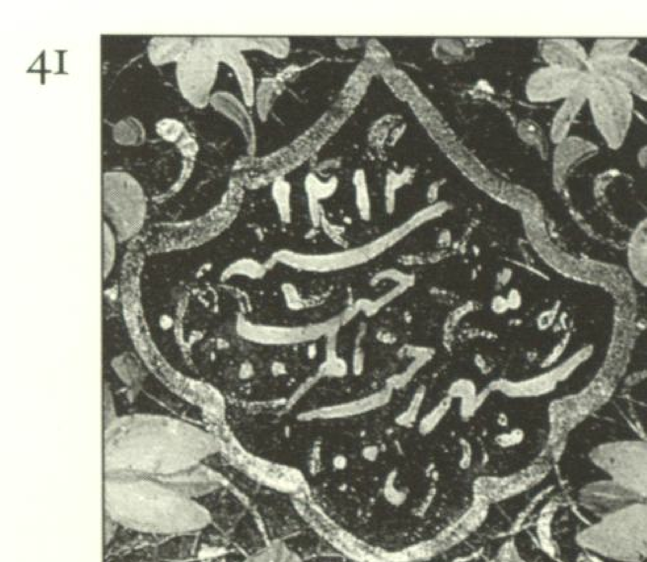
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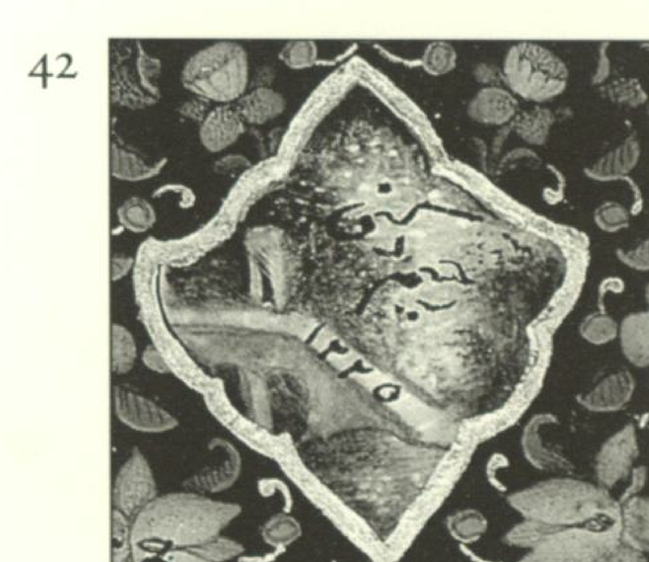
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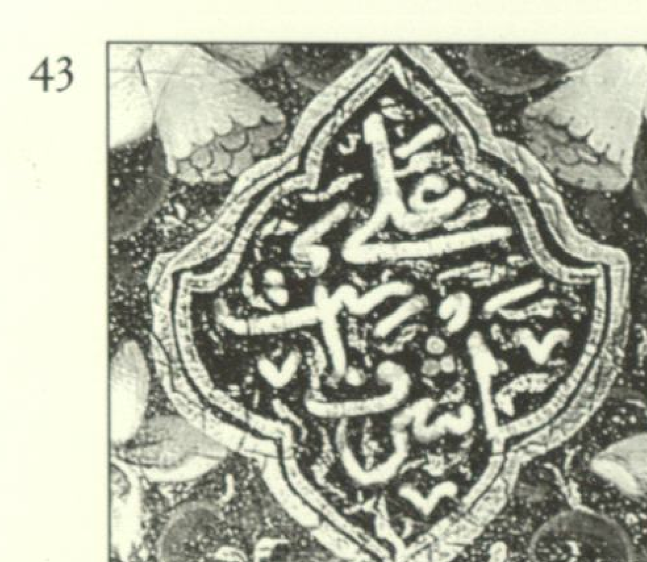
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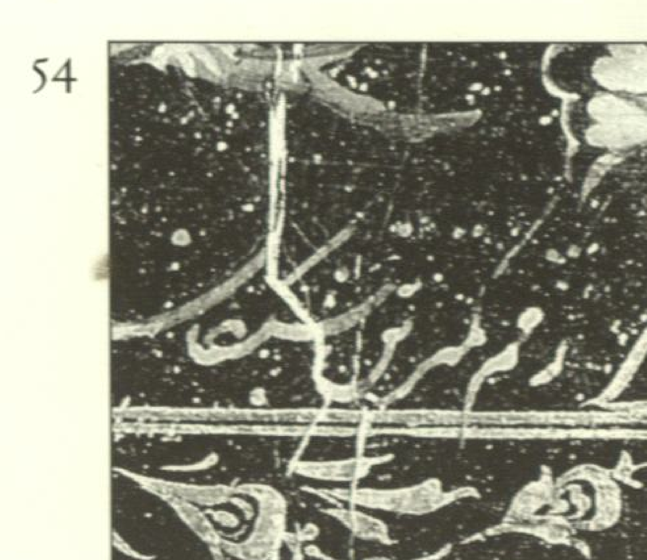
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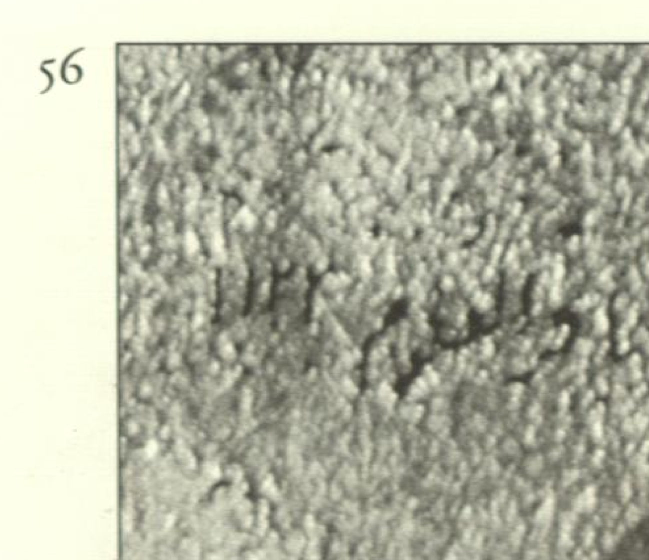
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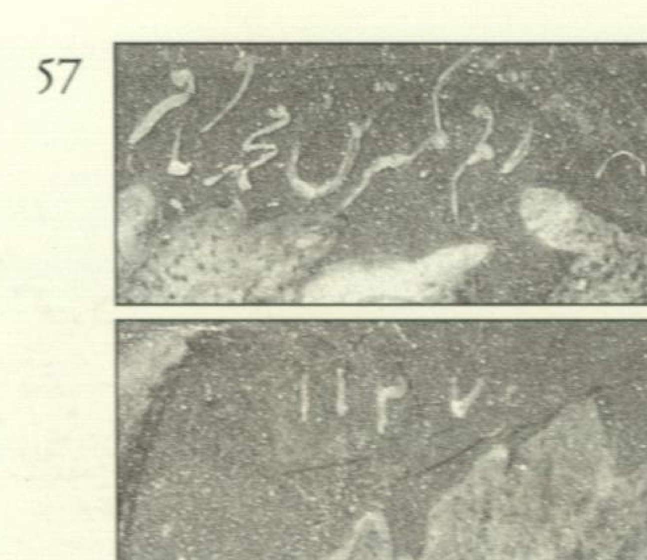
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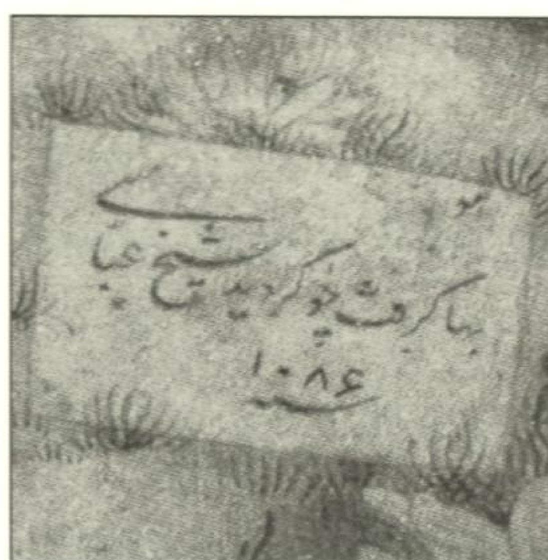
Signatures

Most of the lacquer wares in the Khalili Collection were produced in Iran, in a 250-year period stretching from the reign of the Safavid ruler Shah Sulayman (1666–94) to the fall of the Qajar dynasty in 1924. Literary and documentary sources dealing with Iranian painters in lacquer and other media during this time are scarce, and the signatures that they sometimes placed on their work are therefore of prime importance. Problems of palaeography and authenticity mean that it is not enough merely to transcribe the signature, and we have followed the model provided by A.S. Melikian-Chirvani in reproducing a photographic detail with the signature.[1] Translations of these texts will be found in the hard information sections of the relevant entries.

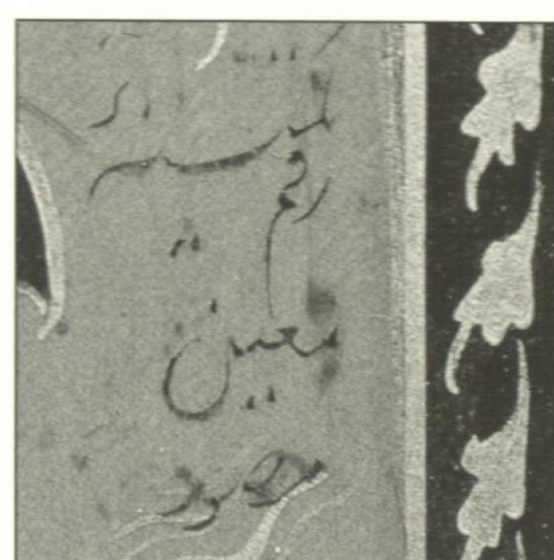
Some signatures used in this period are straightforward avowals of authorship. In these the terms *raqam-i*, *raqamamahu* and *rāqimahu*, here all translated 'painted by',[2] were often employed, along with self-deprecating references to the painter such as *kamtarīn* ('the most humble') or *kamtarīn bandah* ('the most humble servant').[3] In other cases the signatures took the form of invocations or quotations that referred to the figure in Islamic tradition after whom the artist was named.[4] Both types of signature were employed by Muhammad Zaman son of Hajji Yusuf of Qum, the court painter of Shah Sulayman. He was the formative influence on Iranian painting of later periods, including painting on lacquer,[5] and it appears that his followers copied his manner of signing his work as well as his style of painting.

1. Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p.[113].
2. But see Adle 1980, pp.19–20, for a more fanciful interpretation.
3. *Cf.* p.44 above.
4. *Cf.* pp.72–6 above. See also Zoka' 1354 c.
5. See pp.54–7 above.

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18



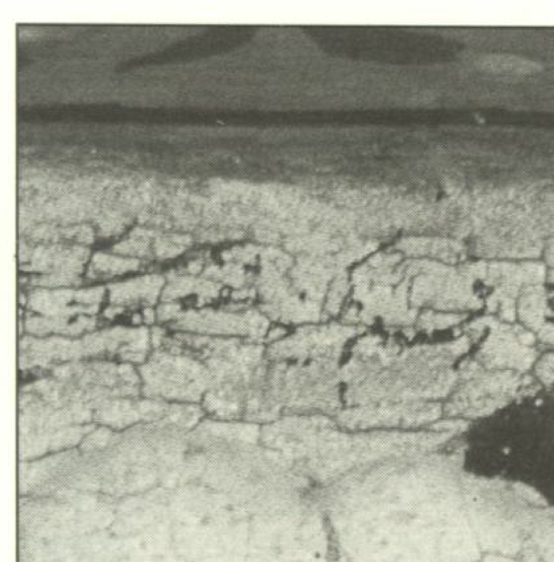
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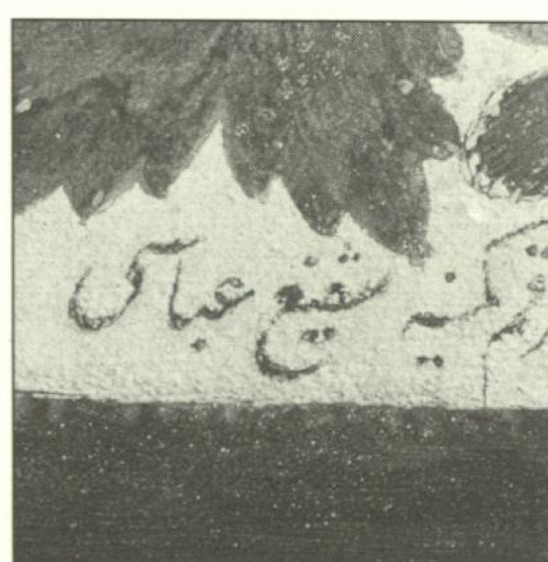
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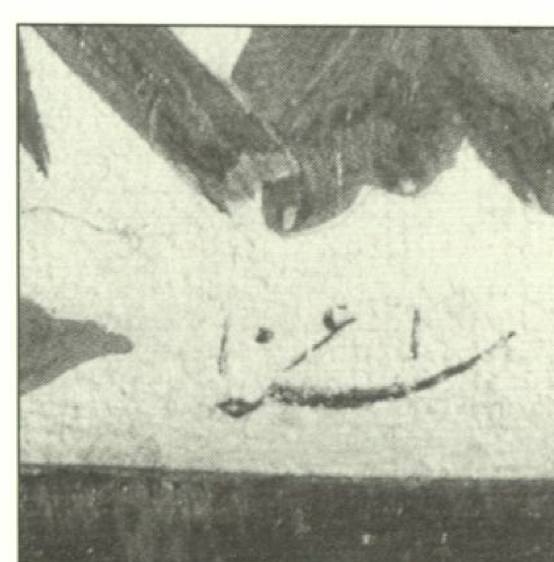
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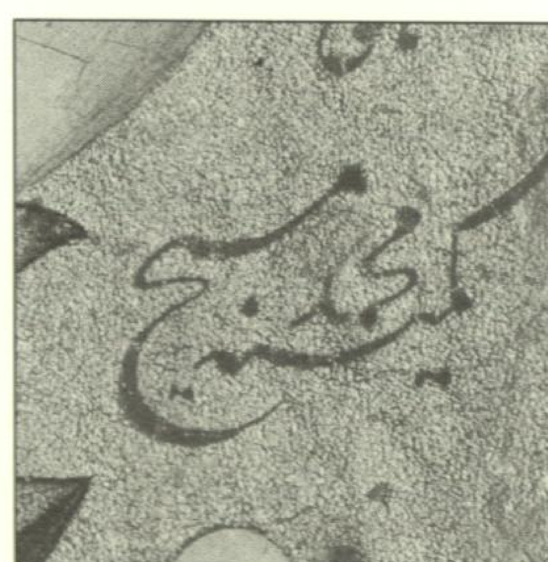
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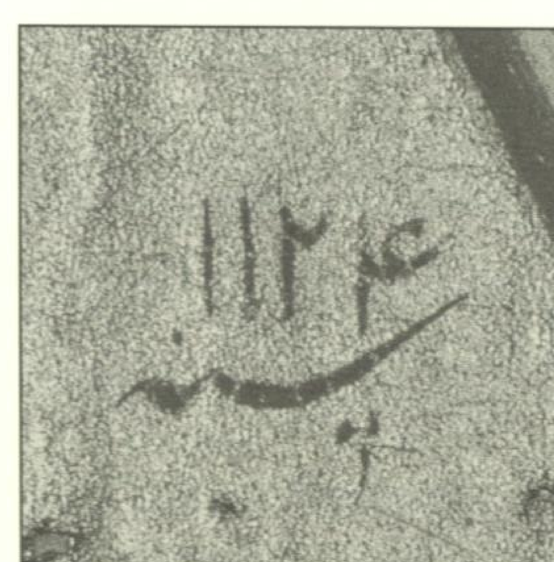
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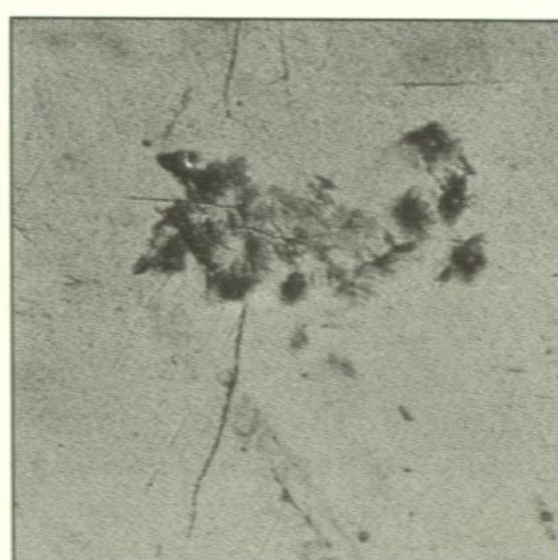
24



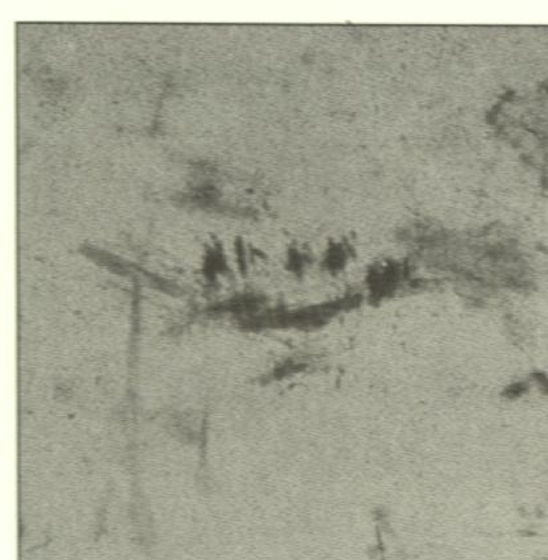
24



26



26



27





216 detail



216 detail

215

Shield
India, mid-19th century

A convex circular body of rhinoceros hide, 58.5 cm in diameter, with four pewter bosses securing the handles and pad on the inside
accession no. LAQ502

The design, of flowers springing from four groups of rocks, is adapted from the stock Japanese motif of rocks and peonies; it is executed mostly in gold and is partly raised in low relief, in imitation of the Japanese technique of *nashiji* ('sparkling gold').



216

216

Fan
Kashmir, 19th century

Wood faced with cloth and gesso, 121 × 28 cm, the handle in two parts joined by a metal screw fitting
accession no. LAQ517

Either side of the fan is decorated with an overall design of massed flowers outlined in gold. The handle is divided into five sections, each filled with a different floral pattern.

A reading stand decorated in the same manner is in the David Collection in Copenhagen.[1]

1. Folsach 1990, no.13.



215

211

Pen box
Kashmir, *circa* 1876–8

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24 × 4.9 × 4 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The work of 'Aziz Mughal'.
accession no. LAQ445

The top is decorated with three lobed medallions containing an inscription that records the patron as a senior civil official at an Indian court, whose name has been partially effaced ('order from … Sahib Bahadur'). This gentleman is also addressed in a grandiose invocation, 'O you who are the foremost name in the register of the literate in all the world, the refuge of the wise, and the pride of the literate!' The medallions are surrounded by close-set sprays of flowers on a gold ground, and there is a floral border. The decoration of the sides is similar, but the medallions contain floral designs rather than an inscription.

The base has gold floral sprays on green, red and black grounds. The sliding compartment is red on the outside and green on the inside, with floral scrollwork designs in gold.

Other works by 'Aziz Mughal recorded by Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi are dated AH 1293 (AD 1876–7) and AH 1295 (AD 1878).[1]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.356, no.619; III, p.1471.

212

Pen box
Kashmir, 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 27 × 5.7 × 4.8 cm
accession no. LAQ366

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with slightly raised floral designs in colours and gold. The base and the inner and outer surfaces of the sliding compartment are covered with a diaper design of small black flowers on a pale-yellow ground. These are very similar to those on cat.213, only in this instance they are joined by a network of delicate spirals.

213

Pen box
Kashmir, 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 26.7 × 5.3 × 4.5 cm
accession no. LAQ367

The top and sides of the cover are covered with floral designs in cream and gold on a black ground. The base of the cover is decorated with diaper designs of small, schematic black flowers on a pale-yellow ground. Similar motifs appear on the inside and outside of the sliding compartment.

214

Pen box
Probably Kashmir, late 18th or early 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with slightly convex top, 30.5 × 7.6 × 6.3 cm
accession no. LAQ363

The top and sides of this box are painted with a black ground and a central motif of nightingales perched on rose sprays. This is flanked by illuminated scrollwork and enclosed within a border of inscribed panels. The texts are Persian verses derived from *ghazals* of Hafiz. The base has a panel of large-scale gold scrollwork on a black ground, and the interior is plain black.



214













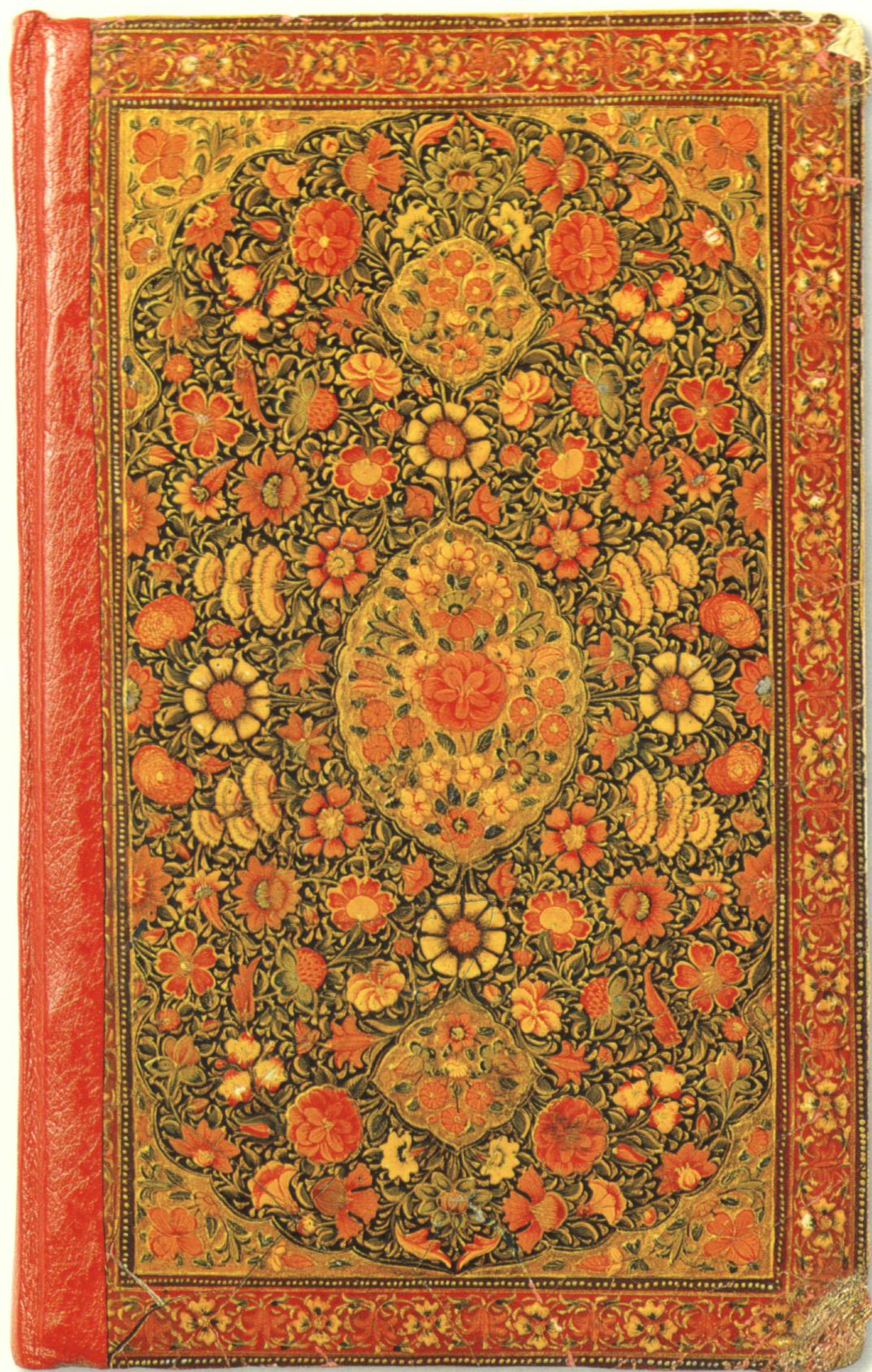
1, 212, 213



210 doublure



207 lower cover


208 lower cover


209 upper cover

206

Pair of book covers
Kashmir, 18th or 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 30.4 × 21.1 cm, lined with reddish-brown leather
accession no. LAQ486
published Christie's, London, 9 October 1990, lot no.114

The outer covers have a rich gold background, with a central design featuring an elaborate vase of flowers flanked by two birds. This central motif is surrounded by feather-like scrolls, which form an oval panel. The spandrels are filled with a floral pattern, and the border contains a convolvulus scroll.

207

Pair of book covers
India, 18th or 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 19.4 × 13 cm
accession no. LAQ490

The outer covers have central panels filled with a mass of roses and other flowers on a gold ground. Each panel has a line of inscription above and below and is surrounded by a wide frame of interlacing strapwork and conventional floral motifs in gold on a black ground. The inscriptions, which are written in large *naskh*, in an Indian hand, consist of the *basmalah* ('In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful') and a text that informs us that, 'This noble manuscript of the Ninety-nine Names contains the names of God – May He be exalted! May His glory be honoured! May His bounty be universal!'

The doublures are similar, but they lack the inscription.

208

Binding of a *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*
Kashmir, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 19.6 × 12 cm
accession no. MSS71

This binding is attached to a copy of the *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* of al-Jazuli, made in northern India in the 19th century. The outer covers have a black field covered with a dense floral pattern and set with a central medallion, pendants and corner-pieces, with massed flowers on a gold ground; there is a crimson floral border.

The doublures are decorated in a similar manner to cat.209.

209

Binding of a Qur'an section
Kashmir, 18th or 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 23.4 × 15.2 cm
accession no. QUR347

This binding is attached to an undated copy of the fifth section of a 30-part Qur'an. The outer covers have a crimson field surrounded by a floral border with a yellow ground. The main field is set with rows of flowering plants, executed in colours and gold.

The doublures are painted with a large bouquet of flowers on an orange ground, surrounded by a floral border on a black ground; the two lobed corner-pieces at the top of the main field suggest an arched niche.

210

Binding of a Qur'an
Kashmir, 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 33.3 × 19.2 cm
accession no. QUR354

The colophon of the Qur'an to which this binding is attached records that it was copied by Nasr Harati in AH 1010 (AD 1601–2), but this may be a later addition.

The central medallion, pendants and corner-pieces on the outer covers are decorated with massed flowers on a gold ground. The main field is crimson, but this is almost obscured by a dense floral design outlined in gold. A sinuous black line, following the general outlines of the centre-and-corner composition, divides the field into an inner and an outer zone. There is a double border of gold scrolls on crimson and black grounds.

The doublures feature a central oval panel with a black background, almost filled with a very large, stylized bunch of flowers. The spandrels are gold, with massed flowers, and there is a single floral border.



206 upper cover

204

Pen box
Probably Kashmir, 18th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body and rounded lift-off lid with bevelled edges, 27.8 × 6.1 × 5.8 cm; there is a metal ring at either end of the lid
accession no. LAQ365

The top and sides of the box are black and are covered with floral designs executed in gold and in varnish mixed with ground mother-of-pearl. The base is plain red with simple gold rules. The interior is lined with red leather. In addition, the inside of the lid is painted with a crude floral design in green, enclosed by a border of green leaves. Traces of repairs and the rings on the lid suggest that the pen box was once equipped with a hasp, hinges and chain.

205

Pen box
Probably Kashmir, 18th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body on small feet and bevelled lift-off lid, 27.2 × 9 × 6.8 cm; there is an inner lift-out tray
accession no. LAQ362

The top and sides are decorated with a repeating pattern of a flowering plant in gold and black on an ivory ground, and the bevelled surfaces have a floral scroll in the same colours on a gold ground. The interior is red, with lobed medallions and pendants filled with gold floral designs.

The interior is divided into two small, and one large, compartments. The former have inkwells made from sheet brass, while the latter contains a lift-out tray subdivided into two compartments for pens, and decorated *en suite* with the interior of the pen box.



205





, 204

203

Pen box
Kashmir, 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body and lift-off lid, 27.2 × 6.1 × 5.3 cm. The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the humble Muhammad Nabi.'
accession no. LAQ146

The top and inside of the lid and the sides of the box are decorated with figural panels and bust portraits. There are amorous couples, pastoral and hunting scenes, and two of the figures on the top of the lid are identified as Yaghut Malik and Badi' al-Mulk. The style employed is that of Kashmiri manuscript illustration of the late 18th and 19th centuries,[1] but the layout, especially the arrangement of the sides, is influenced by late Safavid lacquer pen boxes (cat.26, for example).

The base of the box is painted with a series of flowering plants on a light brown ground. The plants are arranged vertically in a row, and include single and double roses, tulips and violets. This work is of higher quality and appears considerably older than the figural scenes on the principal surfaces, and we may presume that the latter were painted over the original decoration.



203 detail of base

According to Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi, Muhammad Nabi was an Iranian painter of the 18th century who settled in India, but his entry is based entirely on this pen box.[2]

1. Adamova & Grek 1976.
2. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, p.1092, no.1160.





202 side, inside of lid

202

Pen box
Kashmir, 18th century

Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with rounded ends, 26.8 × 5.2 × 5 cm. The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Allahvirdi.'
accession no. LAQ376

The top of the lid is decorated with a vertical portrait of a girl in a costume of gold brocade, who is shown standing by a stream with a gold cup in her hand. Above her, behind a band of rocks, another girl stands between two cypresses, and at the top a young man is presenting a girl with a piece of fruit, the couple being half-concealed by rocks.

The two scenes decorating the inside of the lid are separated by a tank of water; above it a girl wearing only a skirt of gold brocade is shown standing under a tree, while below it an embracing couple and a child are depicted in a horizontal composition.

On the sides of the box young couples, musicians, attendants and horsemen are shown in a landscape. Two of the figures hold books inscribed with Persian verses, one of which reads, 'O painter! if you paint at all, paint Yusuf and Zulaykha.' The base is red, with floral motifs and scrollwork in gold.

The painter responsible for this pen box has been identified with the Safavid prince Allahvirdi Mir Shikar,[1] but the style of painting is similar to that on cat.203, and the box can therefore be ascribed to Kashmir.

1. Boroumand 1366, pp.93–4; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1334–5, no.1357.



201



202

201

Pen box

India, AH 1131 (AD 1718–19)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.3 × 4 × 3.7 cm; lined with leather. The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the humble Muhammad Sabir.'
accession no. LAQ131

The top of the cover shows an Indian lady standing under a tree, holding a branch of it with one hand, and drawing aside her skirt with the other. The landscape scene behind her includes a number of buildings and a horseman, and there are flowers, rocks and a stream in the foreground. The design was clearly derived from Safavid work of the period (compare cat.34).

The sides of the cover are occupied by a continuous wavy floral design on a black ground, but this appears to be the product of a later repainting. The base is decorated by conventional floral motifs, in gold on red, and the sliding compartment is covered in leather. Its sides have the same inlaid repeating design as cat.198, executed in two shades of brown.

This painter was known to Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi only from this pen box.[1]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.897–8, no.1058. See, however, cat.200.



200 outer face of original cover

200

Pair of book covers
India, early 18th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 17.5 × 25.8 cm, with paper doublures. The decoration is signed, 'The servant Muhammad Sabir'
accession no. LAQ291

The original 18th-century work on this binding is a board, measuring 13 by 21 centimetres, decorated in a similar manner to cat.198, with a parrot perched on a stump which has burst into bloom, and surrounded by flowering plants, a small bird, butterflies and clouds, all outlined in gold against an ochre background streaked with gold. The signature appears beneath the parrot's feet.

The board has been extended by the addition of a papier-mâché frame, painted with a repeat floral pattern on a black ground. The second board is a later copy of this ensemble.

As in the case of cat.201, Muhammad Sabir seems to have copied a Safavid model. A similar scene outlined in gold and set against a sparkling brown ground appears on a binding signed by Shafi' 'Abbasi in AH 1070 (AD 1659–60).[1] The streaked effect may be an attempt to reproduce the Iranian's sparkling ground.

1. Christie's, London, 9 October 1990, lot no.98.



199 outer covers and flap

199

Pair of book covers with a flap
India or Iran, 17th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 15.5 × 8.4 cm, and two-part flap, 15.5 × 1.1 cm and 15.5 × 4.8 cm, set within a later binding of red leather, with borders tooled in gilt, 17.3 × 30 cm, with doublures of plain red leather
accession no. LAQ279

The outer covers are decorated with flowering plants, outlined in gold on a sparkling brown ground. These are arranged in rows and include pinks, crocuses, poppies, primroses, convolvulus and tulips, all framed by a border of gold scrollwork on a black ground.

The arrangement of the flowering plants on this binding recalls that employed on cat.19 and cat.20, but the painting techniques are similar to those used on cat.54.[1]

1. Compare also Christie's, London, 9 October 1990, lot no.101.









198 top and inside of lid, side, base









97 top and inside of lid, side, base

196

Mirror case with shutter
India, *circa* 1630

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 15.7 × 10.9 cm, and fitted shutter, 13.9 × 9.1 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The work of Manohar' and 'Manohar'.
accession no. LAQ512

The outer face of the shutter depicts a woman of high rank dressed as a yogini, a female mystic, holding a *morchal*, a fly whisk of peacock feathers, on a green ground with gold spiral scrolls. Fine gold scrollwork of another type fills the border. The inner face shows Shah Jahan seated under a canopy, haloed, and holding a rosebud in one hand and a gold fly whisk in the other. On the back of the case a dervish is shown seated on a carpet in a garden; his knees are drawn up, and he dozes with his head resting on his right shoulder. The portrait is surrounded by three borders with gold-work of different colours, which match those on the front.

The body of this mirror case is very thin and light, and the extremely refined decoration is by Manohar, one of the most celebrated Mughal court painters of the late 16th and early 17th century. These facts, together with the portrait of the young Shah Jahan with an imperial halo, suggest that this piece was made for the Mughal court soon after Shah Jahan's accession in 1628. The mirror case must therefore have been one of the last works of Manohar, and, as the earliest lacquer mirror case so far recorded, it is also an object of importance in the history of bookbinder's lacquer.[1]

1. For further discussion, see above, p.234.

197

Pen box
India or Iran, *circa* 1700

Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with rounded ends, 30.5 × 6.7 × 5.2 cm, lined with leather; repairs indicate that the lid was once attached by a hasp, hinges and chains.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the servant Rahim Dakani.'
accession no. LAQ133

The top of the lid has a dark-green ground and is framed by a red border decorated with vine-scrolls in gold. The main field is set with a lobed medallion and two separate, palmette-shaped pendants, and the intervening spaces are filled with vines in a sparkling light green, outlined in gold. The central medallion is painted with a scene of an Indian prince entertaining a lady on a terrace, with a walled palace in the distance; the pendants each portray a female musician.

The sides of the lid are black with gold floral scrollwork, and the inside has an ochre ground, which is painted with a flower-and-bird design in a distinctively spindly style reminiscent of work from Golconda: two birds are perched on a spreading rose-bush, between clumps of pinks and French marigolds, and the air is full of insects, two of which the birds have caught.

The sides of the box itself are gold and are exquisitely painted with irises, roses, carnations and other flowering plants, set at regular intervals. The base has a vine, painted in a sparkling coppery gold and outlined in gold, on a red ground.

There are numerous parallels to be drawn between the decoration of this pen box and Iranian bookbinder's lacquer of the later 17th and early 18th century. The base can be compared with that of cat.26, for example, in terms of both the motif and its execution, and the sides with cat.19–23. However, it is not clear whether Rahim Dakani worked in his native India or in Iran (see pp.234–5).

198

Pen box
India, early 18th century

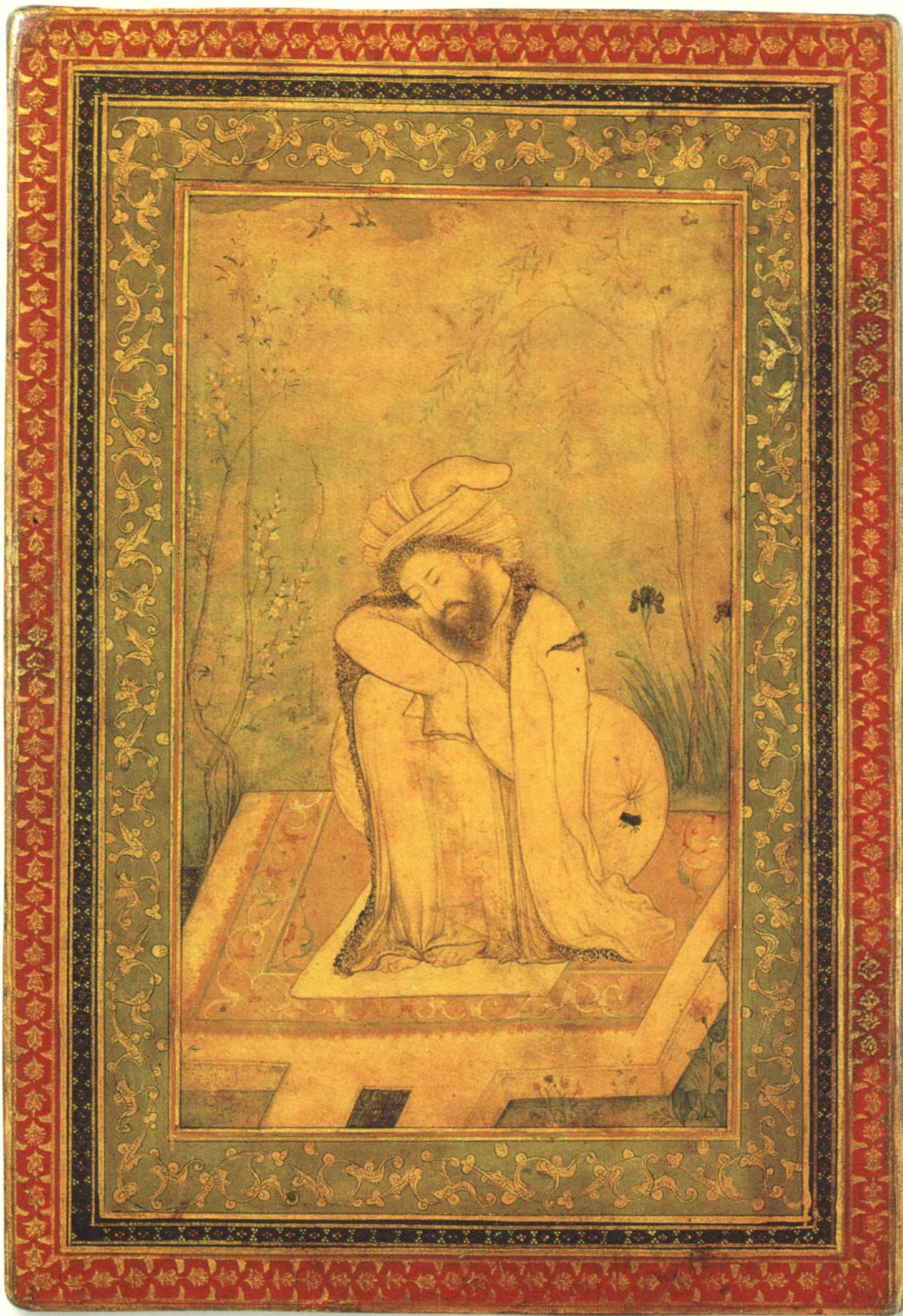
Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with rounded ends, 35.9 × 8.7 × 7 cm, lined with leather
accession no. LAQ132

The top of the lid is decorated with a design of flowering trees and birds – a peacock, a cock and hen and a pair of hoopoes can be identified – on a yellow ground. All the elements are outlined in gold, and the background is covered with small gold spirals; half-concealed among them are the numbers 400, 40, 8, and 2, but their significance is obscure.[1] The sides of the lid are black, with gold floral scrollwork in the Iranian manner, and the inside is decorated with two parrots and a small fox among blossoms and clouds on a plain background.

Around the sides of the box itself is a series of formalized blossoming plants, set at regular intervals; the treatment and the background are the same as on the top of the lid. The base has a convolvulus-scroll design in olive green, outlined in gold, on a plain yellow ground.

The box is lined with red leather, and the band that fits into the lid is inlaid with gilt leather to form a repeating design of reciprocal trefoils.

1. One possibility is that the numbers should read in the sequence 40–8–2–400 which, when converted into *abjad* numerals, spells the word *maḥabbat* ('love').



196 back of case



196 front of case with shutter



196 inner face of shutter



194, 195

193

Pen box
Probably Istanbul,
AH 1081 (AD 1670–71)
Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 26.4 × 5.2 × 4.2 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The work of Seyyid Ali'.
accession no. LAQ390

The top of the cover bears five lobed medallions filled with floral scroll-work, as are the spaces between them. The sides bear Persian verses in elegant *nasta'līq* calligraphy outlined in gold: 'The inkwell and the pen are the symbols of knowledge; they mark you out as a man of wealth and influence. The mouth of the inkwell and the tongue of the pen may be signs of knowledge to the wise man.' These verses are written on slightly raised panels, also decorated with arabesque scrollwork. The base of the cover is black, with a border of gold scrolls of a European type, and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with floral scrolls in gold.

Although this pen box has a typically Iranian form (a case with a sliding compartment) and is decorated with Persian verses in the *nasta'līq* script, a number of features suggest that this is Turkish rather than Iranian work. One is the style of *nasta'līq* employed, another is the type of Europeanizing leaf pattern seen on the base. The signature, too, which was written in a minute gold hand in two tiny cartouches on the top of the cover, is more typical of Ottoman than Safavid artists.

A Turkish provenance is supported by the fact that no artist called Sayyid 'Ali is known to have been working in Iran in the later 17th century, when this pen box was made.[1] On the other hand, Kemal Çığ has recorded a bow in the Topkapı Palace Museum with decoration signed by a craftsman called Ali Çelebi,[2] and he attributed two other, unsigned bows in the same Museum[3] and a scribe's table in the collection of E.H. Ayverdi to the same artist. As the signed bow is dated AH 1085 (AD 1674–5), four years after cat.193, it is possible that Seyyid Ali and Ali Çelebi were the same person.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.231–2, nos 444–7; III, pp.1313–34, no.1355, which repeats no.447.
2. Inv.no.9264; see Çığ 1970, p.246.
3. Inv.nos 1063, 9238.

194

Pen case
Turkey, late 18th or early 19th century

Two-part cylindrical papier-mâché case, partially lined with leather, 30 cm long and 4.1 cm in diameter; an inkwell of brass sheet, 4.2 cm high, fits into the base
accession no. LAQ484

This is an Ottoman pen case of the cylindrical type, which is close in shape to cases made for carrying documents in the form of scrolls (compare cat.195). The long, domed cap fits over a leather-covered flange of almost the same length, and the base is recessed to accommodate the inkwell. The decoration consists of four bands of illumination in a Europeanized 'Ottoman baroque' style, on a coffee-coloured ground.

There is another pen case of this shape and of about this date in the Khalili Collection, but it is faced with mother-of-pearl. Like that example, this pen case is stable when stood upright, because of the weight of the inkwell in the base.[1]

1. Geneva 1995, nos 112, 113.

195

Case for a scroll
India or Turkey, 19th century

Cylindrical papier-mâché case, 43.3 cm long and 5.1 cm in diameter
accession no. LAQ433

The gold ground of the exterior is set with a repeating pattern of a floral spray, that appears to imitate a textile design. The case is constructed in a similar way to cat.194, but the flange over which the cap fits is faced with orange paper sprinkled with silver.



193

190

Book cover
Istanbul, later 17th century

Leather-covered papier-mâché board, 28.2 × 19 cm, with a leather doublure
accession no. LAQ290

The exterior has a field of dark-brown leather, which is painted with floral scrollwork and clouds in gold and colours. The centre-piece, pendants and corner-pieces were made as separate pieces of leather that have been laid into recesses cut in the board and are slightly sunken. They were block-pressed with floral and arabesque designs, which have again been enhanced with gold and colours. The doublures, also of dark-brown leather, were formerly decorated with a centre-piece, pendants and corner-pieces of black leather filigree on coloured grounds, but these are now damaged.

This cover may be compared with that on an Ottoman Turkish manuscript in Istanbul that is dated 1685.[1]

1. University Library, MS.T.5461; Atasoy 1981, pl.2a.

191

Envelope flap from a binding
Ottoman empire, 16th century

Leather-covered papier-mâché board, 50.9 × 16.5 cm, with a leather doublure
accession no. MSS552
published Geneva 1995, no.153

This flap came from a very fine Ottoman binding and displays the technical virtuosity of its maker, for the processes employed in its manufacture include the gilt tooling of the borders, the moulding under pressure applied to the recessed centre- and corner-pieces, and the varnished goldwork of the main field. This last consists of large cloud bands over a rotating floral scroll and bears some relation, in technique as well as in design, to the type of lacquer decoration seen on cat.4. In turn, work of the kind seen on cat.191 appears to have inspired the later 17th-century work exemplified by cat.190.

A fourth technique, leather filigree, was used in the production of the centre- and corner-pieces of the doublure. These were executed in black leather over a mid-blue ground, while the main field is of red leather. As on the outer covers, the design supplied appears to have been too small for the size of binding required, and the difference has been made up by tooling a wide border in gold around three sides of the main field.

192

Pair of book covers
Istanbul, 18th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 24.8 × 14.5 cm.
The decoration of the doublures is signed, 'The work of Seyyid Ahmed'.
accession no. LAQ498
published Sotheby's, London, 15 October 1984, lot no.175; Christie's, London, April 1992, lot no.128

The outer covers have a reddish-brown ground painted with a fine, swirling, floral design. The elements in the design are outlined in gold, and the whole composition is framed by a border of a repeating leaf pattern in gold.

The doublures are dark brown; they are framed by a single gold fillet, and they have a large and splendid s-shaped leaf painted in gold in the centre. The Seyyid Ahmed who signed them may be the artist of that name listed by Kemal Çığ.[1]

1. Çığ 1970, p.249.




192 outer cover and doublure



191 exterior



190 outer cover

Other pieces in the Khalili Collection show that bookbinder's lacquer became thoroughly naturalized in India in the course of the 18th century, to such a degree that the Kashmiri bindings of the 19th century might almost be classified as folk art. This process may be observed in the case of two 18th-century examples, a pen box, cat.198, and a binding, cat.200, which are in an Indianized idiom loosely based on Iranian flower-and-bird painting: the type of birds depicted – a parrot, a peacock, a mandarin duck – are rather more exotic than the dull but sweet-voiced passerines of Iranian art.

1. See p.14, above.
2. Many lacquer bindings described as having leather-covered boards were in fact made by painting directly on to the pasteboard, as small areas of damage to the decoration often show. A case in point is the cover on MS.H.802 in the Topkapı Palace Library (Tanındı 1984, fig.18; Atıl 1987, no.33; Rogers & Ward 1988, no.35).
3. Tanındı 1984.
4. Although Tanındı (1984, p.227) classed the binding of MS.4199 in the Chester Beatty Library (James 1981a, p.318–19, and pl.2; 1981b, fig.5) as the work of a master who had arrived in Istanbul from Herat by way of Tabriz, this seems unlikely in view of its inferior quality.
5. See the comments of Filiz Çağman in Paris 1990, no.130, for example.
6. Geneva 1995, no.152.
7. Topkapı Palace Library, MS.H.983; Tanındı 1984, fig.5.
8. Tanındı 1984, p.232.
9. See Petrasch *et al.* 1991, nos 162–8, for example. Those with dates were made between 1657 and 1681.
10. Karabacek 1913, pp.52–3.
11. For particularly fine examples of a leather-covered domed type current in the 17th century, see Arseven, no date, figs 700–702; Folsach 1990, no.14; Petrasch *et al.* 1991, no.293.
12. Kütükoğlu 1983, pp.106–8.
13. Istanbul University Library, MS.T.5461; see Atasoy 1981, p.304 and pl.2a.
14. The album is MS.A.3652; see Arseven, no date, pl.29; Çığ 1971, figs XXXV, XLI; Atıl 1980, fig.123; Atasoy 1981, pl.2b; Istanbul 1983, no.E.316.
15. On this painter, see Atasoy 1981, pp.304–5, and the sources cited there.
16. Another fine binding by Ali of Üsküdar is on MS.T.5650 in Istanbul University Library, which is dated 1726; see Atasoy 1981, p.304, and pl.3a.
17. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Library, MS.A.3652; Çığ 1971, no.XXXVI; Atasoy 1981, p.305.
18. Ünver 1964, p.120.
19. The book is Topkapı Palace Library, MS.A.1933; see Tanındı 1984, p.223, n.1, where it is referred to as MS.R.1933. Tanındı attributed it to the mid-15th century, but it should probably be redated to the last quarter of the century, not only on the basis of the decoration of its exterior but also because its doublures can be compared with that of the lower cover of a copy of the *Humāy u Humāyūn* of Khwaju Kirmani, made in Herat in 1485 (Topkapı Palace Museum, MS.R.1045; Aslanapa 1979, pl.XI, shown upside down).
20. *Cf.* Raby & Tanındı 1993, no.25.
21. But *cf.* also the binding of MS.H.802 in the Topkapı Palace Library; Tanındı 1984, fig.18; Atıl 1987, no.33a; Rogers & Ward 1988, no.35a. If this binding really does date from the 1530s, as has generally been supposed, then it and others like it that have not survived may have been the model for the pseudo-*tianqi* style of the 18th century.
22. Atasoy 1981, p.305, and pl.3b.
23. A lacquer-painter of this name was also mentioned by Çığ (1970, p.249). That the only two signed examples of Turkish bookbinder's lacquer in the Khalili Collection (cat.192 and 193) were both made by *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet) raises the question whether there was a dynasty of bowmaker-*sayyids* active in 17th- and 18th-century Turkey, just as there had been in 15th-century Herat (see above, p.15).
24. For examples, see Çığ 1971, nos XXXIX–XLVI.
25. Zebrowski 1981a, pp.335–6, pls 2b–3a; London 1982, no.544.
26. London, British Library, OR.MS.12,208; Gardner 1963, p.143 and fig.11.
27. Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, acc.no.W.624; S.C. Welch 1985, no.111. See also Grube 1981, p.278 and n.12.
28. Zebrowski 1981a, pp.334–5, pls 1a–d.
29. G.D. Lowry in Beach 1978, p.130. Cat.196 and another work ascribed to the same date, *circa* 1630 (Falk & Archer 1981, no.55), appear to be Manohar's last known works.
30. G.D. Lowry in Beach 1978, p.134.
31. The presence of European mirrors of silvered glass at the Mughal court was first recorded in 1608 (Qaisar 1982, pp.72–3). Our thanks to Robert Skelton for this reference.
32. See above, p44.
33. Zebrowski 1981a, pp.336–8, and pls 3, 4; 1981b, pp.180–81, and fig.197; 1983, p.201, and figs 169–76. Zebrowski also credited Rahim with the binding of the *Khamsah* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi referred to above. For what may be other examples of his work, see Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.183–4, no.376; III, pl.96.
34. Inv.no.851–1889; Zebrowski 1981a, p.336 and pl.3b; 1981b, pp.180–81 and fig.197; London 1982, no.548; 1983, p.201, and figs 169–74; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.183.
35. Zebrowski 1981a, p.336–7, and pl.3 c–d; 1983, p.201, and fig.176; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.183.

India

The production of bookbinder's lacquer in India can be traced no earlier than the reign of the Emperor Akbar (1556–1605). A tiny oblong album containing work by 'Abd al-Rahim 'Anbarinqalam, a leading calligrapher at Akbar's court, has a lacquer binding signed by the painter Ikhlas,[25] and lacquer covers are attached to a *Khamsah* of Nizami copied by 'Abd al-Rahim for the Emperor in 1595,[26] and to a *Khamsah* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi made for Akbar in 1597 or 1598.[27] While the binding of 1595 bears gold-on-black designs, the other two were decorated in the manner of contemporary Iranian polychrome lacquer, with the figures executed in line and colour and the subsidiary motifs outlined in gold, all on a solid ground. Evidence for the existence of such polychrome bindings elsewhere in India can be inferred from a casket in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: its top was repainted in the late 18th or early 19th century, but the hunting scenes on the sides, in the polychrome lacquer technique, have been attributed by Mark Zebrowski to Ahmadnagar in the Deccan in the late 16th century, and by Robert Skelton to Sind in the early 17th century.[28]

If the Ashmolean casket does date from the late 16th or early 17th century, then it is a very early example of the use of the bookbinder's lacquer technique for an object other than a binding, and its existence could indicate that this diversification originated in India. Other evidence that this is so is provided by cat.196 below, which can be dated to *circa* 1630, and is therefore the earliest lacquer mirror case recorded. The artist who signed the object, Manohar, the son of Basawan, flourished from the early 1580s,[29] and he is known to have contributed illustrations to both of Akbar's *Khamsah* manuscripts with a lacquer binding.[30] He therefore worked on imperial commissions for which he or another painter in his circle had to practise the bookbinder's lacquer technique. The presence at the Mughal court of small silvered mirrors of European manufacture may have caused the Emperor or one of his courtiers to seek a means of turning these into acceptable gifts, and as a consequence Manohar or one of his colleagues may have adapted the lacquer bookbinding to a new function.[31]

In general, however, it is difficult to distinguish Indian lacquer of the 17th century from that produced in Iran. The constant movement of artists between Iran and India in this period means that any innovation in one country would have been transmitted rapidly to the other. Cat.19 and 20, for example, are decorated with flowering plants arranged in rows in a manner typical of the Mughal decorative arts, but cat.20 also has a calligraphic border that shows that the binding was in Isfahan by 1695. On the other hand, cat.21, which bears the signature of Shafi' 'Abbasi, an Isfahani painter who is reported to have died in Agra, has a base and sliding compartment decorated in the same style as some Kashmiri pen boxes of the 19th century, such as cat.211–13 below: even if the object was made in Iran it must have been taken to India at some point. Similarly, cat.18 above, which is dated AH 1070 (AD 1659–60), has been attributed to Isfahan, but other work by the same painter, 'the worthless speck of dust Amin', has been ascribed to both Golconda and Isfahan. However, if the Amin who painted cat.18 and a tile-painter called Mirza Amin were the same person, it is possible that some of his work was produced in Bengal, for we know from Nasrabadi that Mirza Amin spent some time there.[32]

Evidence of the type of bookbinder's lacquer produced in the Deccan in the 17th century is provided by the work of an outstanding lacquer-painter of the turn of the 18th century. This artist, Rahim Dakani, was responsible for cat.197 and at least four other works, one of which is dated AH 1118 (AD 1706–7).[33] The most impressive is a tiny papier-mâché casket with ivory trimmings, preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum.[34] This exquisite piece is unsigned, but it is decorated in the same style as a painting in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, that was signed by Rahim.[35] The painter's surname, Dakani, suggests that he was born in the Deccan, and his painting style shows that he trained there, in Golconda. In 1687 this city fell to the Mughals, and Rahim may have left at this time to seek patronage elsewhere: both northern India and Iran have been proposed as his final destination.

decorated with pressure-moulded designs, which could be gilt;[11] others were plain (*düz*); the decoration of yet others was not specified, as was the case with the second type; and the third type were also covered with shagreen.[12]

In this context cat.193, a lacquer pen box inscribed 'the work of Seyyid Ali' and dated AH 1081 (AD 1670–71), appears to be of some significance, for it is a rare signed example of Turkish lacquer from the 17th century. A notable feature of the box is the use of recessed panels in the decoration, and this links it to a small group of late 17th-century Turkish bindings with recessed panels moulded under pressure; these have painted decoration in imitation of bookbinder's lacquer, but on a leather-covered base. One example is attached to a manuscript produced in 1685,[13] and another is cat.190 below. In the early years of the 18th century this apparent revival of interest in bookbinder's lacquer found an influential sponsor in Sultan Ahmed III. The best-known example of his patronage in this respect is the large (46.4 by 28 centimetres) binding of an album of his own poems, which is still kept in the Topkapı Palace Library.[14] The binding is dated AH 1136 (AD 1723–4) and was signed by Ali of Üsküdar, the most celebrated of Ottoman lacquer-painters.[15] The outer covers are decorated with a centre-and-corner composition, and all the fields and figures are filled with dense and colourful ornament, which in its style and quality harks back to the best illumination of the 16th century.[16] Another lacquer binding of similar dimensions is attached to an album of ten *tuğras* in Sultan Ahmed's own hand, which is dated AH 1140 (AD 1727–8).[17] These covers are usually described as the work of Ahmed-i Hazine ('Ahmed of the Treasury') on the basis of an inscription on the album itself, but, as published by Ünver,[18] this should be read as *Katabahu wa-dhahhabahu al-faqīr Aḥmad Mujallid-i Khazīnah*, that is, 'the poor Ahmed, binder to the [royal] library, wrote it and illuminated it'. Thus there is no actual reference to Ahmed binding the album, although his title makes him a likely candidate.

Ahmed III's love of books led him to erect a new library in the Third Court of the Topkapı Palace, and many of the manuscripts transferred there had old lacquer bindings, which the Sultan clearly treasured. For example, there are signs that a 15th-century Herati binding with gold-on-black decoration was attached to the older but undated Arabic manuscript it now encloses only when it was moved from the Privy Chamber in the Third Court to the new library:[19] firstly, there are no seals earlier than that of Sultan Ahmed, and a note on the flyleaf reads, *Odadan çıkan arabî* ('[One of the books in] Arabic that came out of the Chamber');[20] secondly, the text block is over 6 centimetres thick, while the fore-edge section of the flap is a mere 2.5 centimetres wide, the difference having been made up by the replacement leather hinges between the boards. Presumably the binding on the manuscript had deteriorated beyond repair, and a spare lacquer binding was remade to fit it. This antiquarianism would explain the polished revivalism of the binding Ali of Üsküdar made for him in AH 1136 and of other work of this master, who continued to flourish after the Sultan's deposition in 1730.

Much of the bookbinder's lacquer that Ali of Üsküdar produced was decorated with a type of ornament that appears to have been inspired by Iranian pseudo-*tianqi* bindings of the 15th–17th centuries:[21] scrolls bearing stylized floral motifs outlined in gold were set against solid-coloured grounds. The style was used on bindings, as cat.192 shows, but it was employed even more successfully on items with smaller or curved surfaces, such as a group of finely painted quivers in the Topkapı Palace collection, signed by Ali and dated between 1746 and 1757.[22] The outer covers of cat.192 are not signed, but the doublures, which are decorated with a fine example of 18th-century Ottoman gold-work in a completely different style, were produced by an artist called Seyyid Ahmed.[23] In the later 18th century lacquer bindings continued to be produced in some numbers, but examples from this period and the 19th century are usually in the style known as 'Edirne work', which was also used on woodwork of all sizes.[24]

The diffusion of bookbinder's lacquer. Turkey and India

The invention of bookbinder's lacquer in Herat in the last quarter of the 15th century was followed by the diffusion of this art form to other parts of the Islamic world, so that in the course of the following century production began in centres as far apart as Istanbul in the west and the Muslim courts of India in the east. This development has been documented best in the case of Turkey, mainly because of the presence of large and comprehensive collections of lacquer bindings and other wares in the museums and libraries of Istanbul. From these it appears that lacquer production waxed and waned with fashion until the reign of Sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730), when a revival of interest, exemplified by cat.192 below, led to the development of a naturalized tradition of lacquer production that survived until the 19th century. In India, too, bookbinder's lacquer was an important form of decorative art, but the early history of Indian lacquer is not well known. Two early signed pieces in the Khalili Collection (cat.196 and 197 below) are therefore of some consequence.

Turkey

The imitation of Chinese lacquer in the production of bookbindings occurred in Istanbul in the 1460s, a decade before the earliest evidence for comparable experiments in Herat.[1] But the technique developed in Istanbul, which is represented by a single set of book covers in the Topkapı Palace Library, involved the application of painted-and-varnished decoration over leather-covered boards, rather than directly on to the pasteboard, as in the Herat examples. The Istanbul technique does not appear to have found favour in later decades,[2] and the relatively large number of lacquer bindings on manuscripts produced for the Ottoman court in the first half of the 16th century follow the Herat model.[3] As in the case of cat.4 above, stylistic idiosyncracies suggest that these were mostly made by local craftsmen in imitation of Herat lacquer bindings, rather than by artists trained in Herat.[4] However, it is not out of the question that artists from Herat eventually found a home in Istanbul.[5]

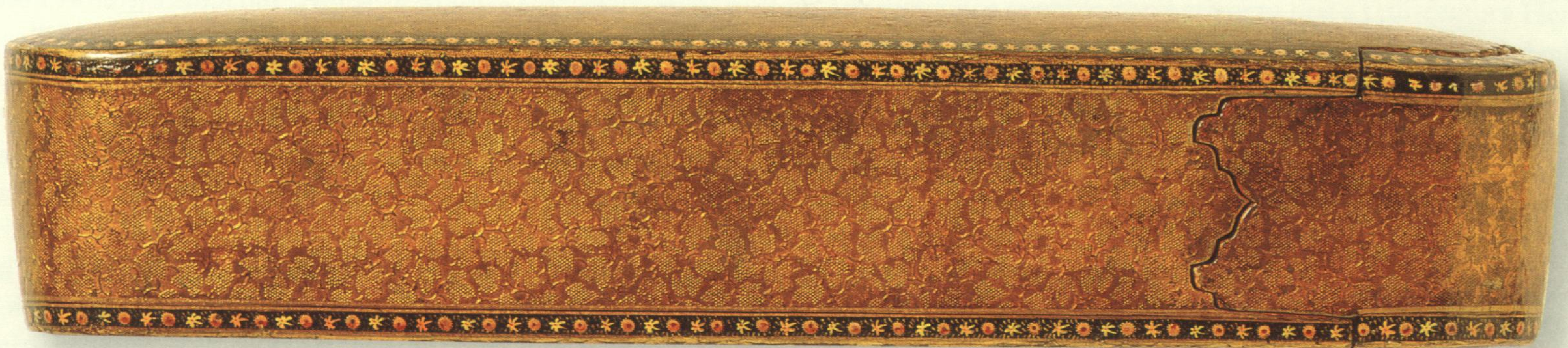
Cat.4 is attached to a copy of the *Būstān* of Shaykh Sa'di made at Tabriz in AH 936 (AD 1529–30), but the manuscript contains a fine frontispiece depicting a royal hunt, which was painted in an Ottoman court style of the early 16th century, and it has therefore been suggested that the text block was taken from Tabriz to Istanbul before it had been illustrated and bound.[6] The only other binding of this type is attached to an undated copy of the *Gharā'ib al-ṣighār* of 'Alishir Nava'i, the leading courtier of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in Herat during the period when lacquer bindings were first developed.[7] It may be that the bindings of copies of this book of poems and of other works produced at the court of Sultan Husayn, sent as gifts to other Muslim courts, served as the models for these imitations.

The lack of dated examples suggests that bookbinder's lacquer went out of favour in Turkey in the second half of the 16th century and remained out of fashion during the 17th.[8] The lacquering technique itself was not lost, but its use appears to have been confined to its original purpose, as a protective coating for bows and other military accoutrements; there are many fine examples among the lacquered bows captured from Ottoman armies in the later 17th century.[9] But its use in other contexts appears to have been regarded as a foreign phenomenon, to judge by the Persian–Turkish dictionary of Hasan Şu'uri, which was compiled between 1669 and 1682. This contains an entry on the resin *sandarūs* ('sandarac') that includes the information that the name *rang-i rawghanī* was given to bookbindings, pen boxes and saddle pommels coated with sandarac, and that such wares were 'peculiar to the Persians' (*A'câma mahsus*).[10]

This judgement is confirmed by a register of controlled prices (*narh defteri*) prepared in 1640, which does not include any artefacts that would fall under the heading of bookbinder's lacquer. For example, the register lists 15 types of papier-mâché pen box then available on the Istanbul market, which appear to have come in three shapes: a coffer type with a lid, either domed or flat, and with or without feet; a type with a sliding compartment (see cat.193); and a cylindrical type (see cat.194). Some of the first type were covered with shagreen and







187, 188, 189

187

Pen box
Iran, *circa* 1840–70

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.7 × 4.3 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ448

The pen box has an overall 'engine-turned' surface; the top and sides of the cover were worked in gold, whereas the base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are in red and yellow, with an overlay of green varnish that leaves a series of medallions in reserve. In addition, the top of the cover has a lobed medallion and pendants filled with gold floral scrollwork on a crimson ground.

188

Case for wafer seals
Iran, *circa* 1840–70

Rectangular papier-mâché case and two sliding lids with slightly convex upper surface, 16 × 3.5 × 1.9 cm
accession no. LAQ454

This case, too, was decorated in imitation of the work of Rajab 'Ali and Abu Talib. The top bears one small and two larger sunken panels of elegant *nasta'līq* calligraphy on a ground worked with an 'engine-turned' design, in red on gold. The letters of the inscription, which are slightly raised, are black and are overpainted in gold with tiny faces, animals and other motifs. The base is black, with shaped medallions of the 'engine-turned' pattern, in red on gold.

The texts employed for this inscription are, in the middle cartouche, the invocation, 'O God!', and in the other cartouches the line, 'The scent of ambergris blows from your fine script, not from your love.'



189 detail of base

189

Pen box
Iran, *circa* 1870

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 31.3 × 6.6 × 7 cm; a second, shallow sliding compartment is concealed within the base of the first.
The inside of the cover has been set with the seal of the maker, Muhammad Javad, which is dated AH 1286 (AD 1869–70).
accession no. LAQ158

The top and sides of the cover of this large pen box are gold and are decorated with a small vine-scroll pattern in very low relief. They are framed by black borders decorated with a stylized floral pattern. The base has an overall 'engine-turned' pattern in red and gold; it is overlaid with green varnish but three shaped medallions were left in reserve. The sides of the main sliding compartment are red, with a floral scroll in gold.

An unusual feature of this pen box is the second sliding compartment concealed within the first: its presence can only be detected once the cover has been completely removed. Its sides are decorated with gold scrollwork on a black ground, and its base has the 'engine-turned' pattern in red and gold.

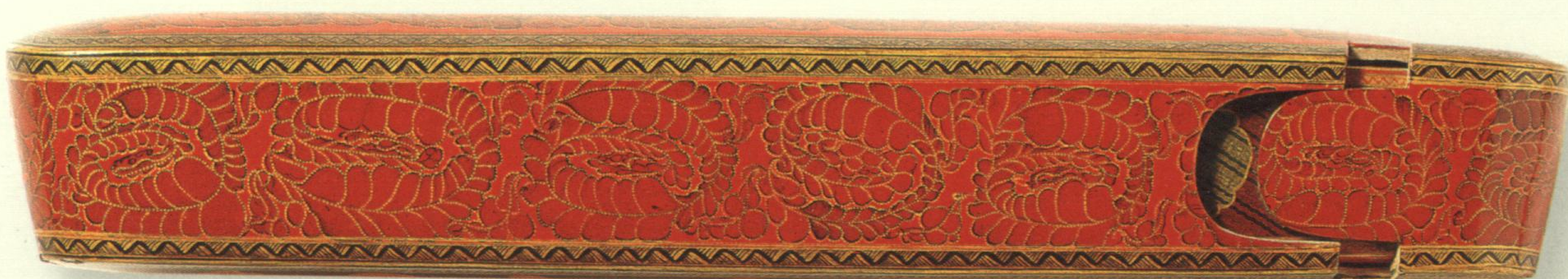
Seals of Muhammad Javad appear on six other pen boxes in the Khalili Collection.[1]

1. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.













184, 185, 186

183

Pen box

Iran, AH 1278 (AD 1861–2)

Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with straight ends, 25.7 × 5.5 × 5.2 cm; there is a double inkpot, made from silver sheet.
The decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris'
accession no. LAQ342

The top and sides are very dark-green and have marbled 'fleshy leaf' designs picked out with gold dotted outlines. The 'engine-turning' pattern occurs on the inside of the lid, where it is the same colour as seen on cat.182, and on the base, the design and colours there being the same as on the bases of cat.178, 180, 181 and 182. The narrow borders are slightly larger, because of the size of the box, and they contain repeat patterns with recognizable flower motifs.

184

Pen box

Iran, *circa* 1840–70

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.5 × 4.5 × 4.5 cm
accession no. LAQ72

The decoration of this pen box is all but identical to that of cat.178 (the tones of red used are lighter and the base is plain red) but the execution is not as refined, and the body is of a coarse type not used by Rajab 'Ali and Abu Talib. Like cat.186, then, this box appears to be by a well-practised imitator of these two masters.

185

Pen box

Iran, AH 1279 (AD 1862–3)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.7 × 3.9 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris', and the word *'āshir* ('tenth') has been written inside the cover where the maker's seal was usually placed.
accession no. LAQ331

On the top of the cover, the two types of medallion seen on the bases of cat.177, 178, 180, 181 and 182 were executed in very low relief, outlined in gold and filled with a rather schematic rendering of 'engine-turning' in gold on red. The surrounding coffee-brown background was marbled with the 'fleshy leaf' design. Similar decoration appears on the sides, while 'engine-turning' was used to decorate the remaining areas on the pen box. The design on the base is very similar to that on the bases of the pen boxes mentioned above, except that the 'engine-turning' has been overlaid with gold floral scrollwork of the type normally seen on these subsidiary areas in the work of other masters. The same floral pattern has been used on the sides of the sliding compartment as a continuous scroll, in combination with 'engine-turning' in red, green and gold. The base of the sliding compartment also has 'engine-turned' decoration, in white on red, darkened with a thin layer of green varnish.

The inventiveness and complexity that Abu Talib managed to achieve in this instance with his limited range of patterns is most impressive.

186

Pen box

Iran, *circa* 1840–70

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4 × 3.5 cm
accession no. LAQ73

This pen box was decorated in the style of Rajab 'Ali and Abu Talib, but the execution is slightly inferior, as is the quality of the body, which has a different type of *qufl*, or 'lock', to those painted by the two masters. It may be the work of the 'Aliquli Hamadani mentioned as an imitator of Abu Talib by Adib Boroumand.[1]

The decoration of the top and sides of the cover is a coarser version of that found on cat.185, although the raised medallions were decorated in green and yellow rather than red and gold. Note too, the loss of the pigeon's-head indents on the two lateral medallions. The decoration of the base of the cover also follows cat.185. The sides of the sliding compartment have the same design, but with the colours reversed, while its base has a textured gold ground set off by a plain black border.

1. Boroumand 1366, p.139.



183









180, 181 top of cover; 182 side of cover, side of sliding compartment

179

Pen box
Iran, AH 1270 (AD 1853–4)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.5 × 4 × 3.7 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of 'The sinful servant, Abu Talib'; the decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris'.
accession no. LAQ226

The cover and the sliding compartment are decorated with an overall design of a type of 'engine-turning' more complex than that used on the subsidiary areas on cat.178. It was executed in gold and green, with the exception of the base of the cover and the base of the sliding compartment, where gold and red are used. Each surface is framed by narrow borders with repeat motifs in gold on black.

It is not clear whether the seal of Abu Talib on the inside of the cover should be seen as a token of ownership or as a maker's mark.[1]

1. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.

180, 181, 182

Three pen boxes
Iran, AH 1277 (AD 1860–61)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.7 × 3.8 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris'
accession no. LAQ414

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.5 × 3.8 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris'
accession no. LAQ326

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 21.8 × 3.9 × 3.9 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris'
accession no. LAQ311

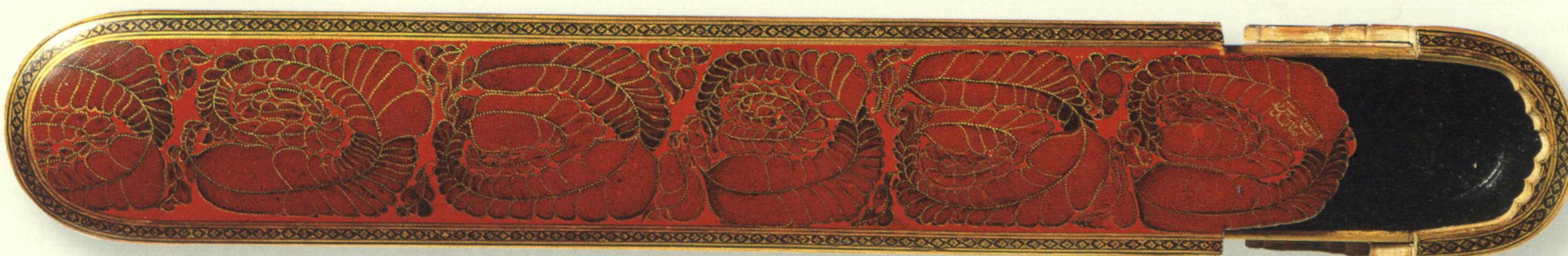
The covers of these three pen boxes are decorated with the same type of 'engine-turning' as cat.179 above, but in black and gold. The sliding compartment of cat.181 is also decorated in the same way as cat.179, but the base of this box's cover and all the subsidiary surfaces of cat.180 and cat.182 are decorated in the same manner as those of cat.178, although the 'engine-turning' is of the more complex type.

On the inside of the sliding compartment of cat.180, underneath where the inkwell would have been, there is the impression of the owner's seal which reads, 'His servant, Ghulam 'Ali'.



179









177, 178

177

Pen box
Iran, AH 1259 (AD 1843–4)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4 × 3.7 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of Rajab 'Ali, which is dated AH 1248 (AD 1832–3); the decoration is inscribed, *Huwa Rajab-'alī nashavad multajī ba-ghayr-i 'Alī* ('He! Rajab 'Ali will take refuge in none but 'Ali.')
accession no. LAQ328

The decoration of this pen box is remarkably sophisticated. The top and sides of the cover have 'fleshy leaf' marbled designs, executed in brown on a ground of close, wavy vermilion lines; the latter resemble Abu Talib's 'engine-turned' pattern, for which they may have been a prototype.

The base of the cover and the sides and base of the sliding compartment are decorated in the same manner. The ground was first worked with a design resembling Abu Talib's 'engine-turning' (in red and gold on the cover, in green and gold on the sliding compartment). It was then overlaid with a solid colour (green on the cover, red on the sliding compartment), leaving a series of medallions in reserve.[1] The medallions were outlined in gold and set off with tiny sprays of conventional floral motifs in gold. The colour of the overlay was also used for the narrow borders, which have tiny repeat patterns in gold.

Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi listed four painters and a gem-carver called Rajab 'Ali who flourished in the 19th century,[2] while Adib Boroumand recorded the first two painters as a single artist, Rajab 'Ali Isfahani.[3]

The first of Karimzadeh Tabrizi's painters (no.368) was the Rajab 'Ali Beg who signed a series of religious portraits in oils in AH 1256 (AD 1840–41), using the expression *ḥusn-i kilk-i Rajab 'Alī zi 'Alī ast* ('Rajab 'Ali's skill with the brush comes from 'Ali.')

The second (no.369) was a lacquer-painter and watercolourist who signed a pen box decorated with flower-and-bird compositions and an octagonal mirror case in the Museum of Ancient Iran in Tehran (inv. no. 3477), which is dated AH 1252 (AD 1836–7) and has decoration of the same type as cat.177, with the lines, *dar ān damī kih shavad āftāb-i ḥashr 'Alī, Rajab 'Alī nashavad multajī ba-ghayr-i 'Alī* ('At that moment when 'Ali becomes the sun of the Doomsday host, Rajab 'Ali shall take refuge in none but 'Ali.') A pen box of AH 1253 (AD 1837–8), in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Tehran and also decorated in the same style, is signed in the same manner as cat.177, with the second half of this couplet.

The third artist of this name (no.370) is the 'Aqa Rajab 'Ali, the son of the late Mirza Muhammad' who was a witness to the marriage contract of Najaf 'Ali's daughter,[4] and who signed a pen box simply as 'Rajab 'Ali' in AH 1289 (AD 1872–3). It may be worth noting that the calligrapher responsible for the decoration of cat.175, whose marbled decoration may have been the forerunner of the 'fleshy leaf' pattern, was (Mirza) Muhammad ibn Muhammad Mahdi.

The fourth Rajab 'Ali (no.372) was an illuminator who wrote poetry under the pen-name Tasalli, and who was mentioned in the biographical dictionary of poets compiled by Rizaquli Khan Hidayat and in a note by Muhammad Qudsi al-Husayni in the *Āṣār-i 'Ajam* of Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi.[5] In the latter he is said to have been the maternal grandfather of Fursat al-Dawlah and a resident of Shiraz.

We may conclude that the second of these supposedly separate individuals painted cat.177, although he may have been the same person as any or all of the other three. Cat.177 also bears Rajab 'Ali's seal on the interior of the cover. This may be an indication that Rajab 'Ali made the body of the pen box, as well as decorating it, but this is the only known example on which his seal appears, and the seal may have been used as a sign of ownership rather than as a maker's brand mark.[6]

1. One medallion has four indentations in the form of pigeon's heads.
2. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.180–82, nos 368–72.
3. Boroumand 1366, p.112.
4. See Part Two, 'Najaf 'Ali and his circle'.
5. Rizaquli Khan Hidayat, p.83; Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi, pp.594–5. He is also mentioned, for example, in the *Nigāristān-i Dārā* of 'Abd al-Razzaq Danbali, p.174.
6. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.

178

Pen box
Iran, AH 1274 (AD 1857–8)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22 × 3.8 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Abu Talib al-Mudarris'
accession no. LAQ514
published Sotheby's, London, 28 April 1993, lot no.43

This pen box is decorated in a very similar manner to cat.177 although it was produced 14 years later and was signed by a different artist. There seems little doubt from this that Abu Talib was a follower of Rajab 'Ali. The 'fleshy leaf' motifs on the top and sides of the cover are more regular and compact, and their forms are picked out in gold dots. This was necessary because the deep-red 'leaves' are set against a bright-red ground, with little contrast between the two.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with the same scheme as on cat.177, although the 'engine-turning' is of a more restrained variety. It was created by painting pairs of wavy lines diagonally across a sparkling ground. The base of the sliding compartment, however, has a different design from that on cat.177; it consists of 'engine-turning' and a black border with repeat motifs in gold.

According to Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi, Abu Talib was a master (*mudarris*) in a madrasah in Hamadan, who painted pen boxes, book covers and caskets in the *abr u bādī* style, also known as *qiyāmat* ('resurrection', that is, the Day of Judgment, and by extension the turmoil that would occur on that day).[1] He flourished between AH 1260 (AD 1844–5) and AH 1279 (AD 1862–3), and the poet and illuminator Muhammad 'Ali Bahar was his son.[2] The reasons for Karimzadeh's belief that Abu Talib lived in Hamadan and that Bahar was his son are not given.

Adib Boroumand described Abu Talib as a calligrapher and illuminator from Zanjan and erroneously believed that Abu Talib invented *abrī-yi muẕahhab* decoration, a style which it was not easy to imitate, as the inferior work of 'Aliquli Hamadani shows; Abu Talib preferred this abstract form of ornament because he was a theologian who disapproved of figural imagery.[3]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.45, no.63. For a reference to Doomsday in an inscription on similar work by Rajab 'Ali, see above, cat.177.
2. On Bahar, see I'timad al-Saltanah, p.288.
3. Boroumand 1366, pp.138–9.





178, 177 details of bases with 'pigeon's-head' design









175, 176

Two unusual types of decoration are associated with the name of Abu Talib al-Mudarris, a decorator of pen boxes who flourished in the 1850s and 1860s. The first is a kind of marbling characterized by fleshy, leaf-like forms, and the second is an effect similar to engine-turning on metal. Abu Talib's role in the production of this branch of decoration is clearly demonstrated by the holdings of the Khalili Collection, which contains no less than seven pen boxes decorated in this manner and signed by him. However, he does not seem to have invented it, for the same type of decoration appears on a group of works produced by an artist called Rajab 'Ali in the period 1836–44 (see cat.177). In view of the dates, it seems possible that Abu Talib learnt the technique associated with his name from Rajab 'Ali. What is more, the marbled floral designs seen on cat.175 and 176 below may well be forerunners of the 'fleshy leaf' design executed by Rajab 'Ali and Abu Talib al-Mudarris. The full range of lacquer wares were decorated in this manner, including bookbindings and caskets, as well as pen boxes and mirror cases.[1]

1. Compare cat.188, below. See, for example, Christie's, London, 21 November 1986, lot no.91 (binding); Sotheby's, London, 26 April 1990, lot no.230 (binding); and lot no.239 (casket).

175

Pen box
Iran, AH 1226 (AD 1811–12)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.3 × 4.2 × 4.1 cm.
The inscriptions are signed, 'Written by the son of Muhammad Mahdi, Muhammad', and, 'Written by the most humble servant, the son of Muhammad Mahdi, Muhammad.'
accession no. LAQ16

The top and sides are red and have lobed medallions and border panels with inscriptions in various scripts, while the spaces between are occupied by black flower-like forms, outlined in gold, whose shapes resemble those seen on some types of marbled paper.

The inscriptions in the three medallions on the top of the box, in black *riqā'*, consist of an Arabic saying attributed to the Imam 'Ali – 'You must learn to write well, for it is one of the keys to subsistence' – as well as the signature and date. The texts written in *naskh* in the black cartouches are an Arabic proverb, 'A man's good breeding is better than his gold, which decays', and a pious injunction, 'Paradise is due to him who visits Fatimah in Qum'. The *shikastah* text, in black, consists of two couplets from a *ghazal* by Hafiz, 'It is morning, O cup-bearer! Fill a cup with wine! The revolution of the heavens will not be delayed: make haste before this transitory world is destroyed! Make us drunk with a goblet of rose-red wine!', and a couplet from another source.

On the sides of the box, in addition to the second signature and date, there are four groups of verses. On one side, for example, there is a quatrain in Arabic attributed to the Imam 'Ali, 'Learn the right way to write, O man of good breeding! For what is writing if not an embellishment of the well-bred? If you are rich, your writing will be an adornment; if you are poor, it is the best way to earn a living.'[1] At one end three lines of a quatrain in Persian, written by Hajib Shirazi in praise of Darvish 'Abd al-Majid Taliqani, have been copied in *shikastah*: 'The treasuries of art are in need of your pen: since God created the tablet and the pen, no one has written *shikastah* as well as you.'[2]

The base of the cover has gold floral scrolls on a red ground, while the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with panels with Arabic inscriptions in *naskh* on a green ground, including the opening verse of a Shi'i pious work, the *Munājāt* of 'Ali.[3] Muhammad ibn Muhammad Mahdi is not known from other sources, although this may be because his signature has been misread as Muhammad Mahdi ibn Muhammad.[4]

1. *Cf.*, pp.10–11; Qazi Ahmad–Minorsky, p.51.
2. See Mihrabadi 1345, pp.156–7. The first line is a repeat of the third, probably in error.
3. See Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, p.238; the coincidence between the texts on this pen box and those on cat.174 is striking.
4. See Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1088–9, no.1155.

176

Pen box
Iran, early 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body and hinged lid, 26.6 × 6.3 × 5.7 cm, with silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ248

The principal decoration consists of a repeating design of black flower-like forms outlined in gold against a yellow ground; these are very close to those on cat.175, and this penbox may also be the work of Muhammad ibn Muhammad Mahdi. On the lid this design forms a long, rectangular panel; on the sides it forms a continuous band; and on the base it occurs in a row of alternating large and small lobed medallions.

The top has a green border with gold-outlined floral elements in a darker green. Similar motifs are used to frame the central band on the sides, only here the border is in two tones of red. They reappear on the ground surrounding the medallions on the base, again in two tones of green. The base is framed by a band of conventional gold scrollwork on black, and the interior of the box is also black.





174 front, back



174

174

Pen box
Iran, AH 1225 (AD 1810–11)
or AH 1252 (AD 1836–7)

Papier-mâché body and hinged lid with rounded ends, 37.2 × 10.2 × 9 cm; the front edge of the lid is scalloped, and there are metal hinges and a hasp. The inscriptions are signed, 'Written by Ahmad al-Tabrizi.'
accession no. LAQ276

The top and sides are decorated with cartouches enclosing inscriptions in Arabic and Persian, reserved against marbled and illuminated grounds. The flange on which the lid sits is unusually high. It is decorated with floral scroll-work on a red ground. Similar motifs decorate the base of the box and the interior of the lid; in the latter case the ground is dark brown.

The three lobed medallions on the top are inscribed in *riqā'* with a prayer in Arabic for the Prophet Muhammad and his family, 'O God! Grant peace and blessing, benediction and mercy to the Prophet, the imam of imams, the revealer of sorrows, the intercessor for the community, Muhammad, and to his family, who are good and fragrant! Grant them eternal peace!'

There are two Arabic texts written in *naskh* in the surrounding cartouches. The first consists of the verses, 'All praise is Yours, O You to whom all generosity, majesty and exaltation belong! Blessed be You, who give to and withold from whom You will! O my God! You may impede me with a thousand proofs, yet the cord of my hope will not break away from You'; these come from the Shi'i prayer known as the *Munājāt* (literally, 'inward conversation'), which is attributed to the Imam 'Ali.[1] The second text is a saying attributed to 'Ali, 'Learn proficiency in writing, O man of good breeding! For what is writing if not an embellishment of the well-bred? If you are rich, your writing will be an adornment; if you are poor, it is the best way to earn a living.'[2] The following has been added to 'Ali's saying: 'Writing is beauty for the wise man, perfection for the rich man, and wealth for the poor man. He has spoken truly.'[3]

There are more Arabic inscriptions in *naskh* around the sides of the lid, which are accompanied by a couplet in Persian and the date. The Arabic is a saying of 'Ali, 'Know that the craft of writing lies hidden in the teaching of the master, and proficiency in it depends on frequent exercises, practice in joining letters, perseverance in forming individual letters, avoidance of what is proscribed, and constant prayer'.[4] The Persian couplet ('This choice pen box – a well-augured work of art – is a gathering-place for the tools of perfection and artistry') is from the quatrain that occurs on cat.93, among other pieces.

On the sides of the base, written in black *naskh*, there is a prayer in Arabic in praise of the Imam 'Ali, together with the signature of the calligrapher and the date, which have been rewritten in a later hand. The Persian text at one end is an elaborate date, 'This was completed with fine script and beautiful painting, 1252', while the repaired text at the other end includes the date 1225.

No calligrapher called Ahmad Tabrizi appears to have been active in the early 19th century, and his name and the date AH 1225 may be false.

1. See Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi, p.238.
2. *Cf.* cat.175, on which a quotation from the *Munājāt* was also used.
3. *Cf.* Qazi Ahmad, p.11; Qazi Ahmad–Minorsky, p.51.
4. *Cf.* Qazi Ahmad, p.11, where this saying is attributed to the Prophet.








168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173

167

Pen box
Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23 × 4.1 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ179

The flower-and-bird designs on this pen box were executed in the style of Lutf 'Ali Shirazi on a dark-green, sparkling background. As on cat.165, the design of the cover is roughly symmetrical, and greater emphasis than is usual has been given to the individual motifs: the oversized hyacinth in the centre and the rose bushes on either side.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with a grape-vine scroll painted in sparkling orange and gold on a red ground. Similar grape-vines are seen on cat.145, 154, 160 and 166.

168

Pen box
Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23 × 4 × 3.8 cm
accession no. LAQ53

This unsigned pen box has decoration similar to the work of Lutf 'Ali Shirazi. The top and sides of the cover are very finely painted with birds and butterflies among roses, hyacinths, fruit trees in full blossom and hazels bearing nuts, all on a sparkling brown ground.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have conventional floral scrollwork executed in gold on a black ground. This work is of a much higher standard than is normal on the subsidiary surfaces of Qajar pen boxes.

169

Pen box
Shiraz, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.7 × 4 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ61

The design of birds, flowers and hazelnuts on a very dark, chocolate-brown ground seen on the top of the cover is almost identical to that found on cat.171. Only one element is missing – a single rose seen from the side, which occurs on the far left of the composition on cat.171. This difference may be explained by the slightly larger proportions of the latter. This similarity is also noticeable in the painting of the sides, although more varieties of flowers are depicted on cat.169, such as the hydrangea on the cap. In both cases the floral elements on the cap are arranged to fit its shape, which is a feature of the work of Lutf 'Ali Shirazi and Muhammad Husayn Shirazi.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold floral scrollwork on a red ground.

170

Pen box
Iran, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24 × 4.1 × 4.1 cm
accession no. LAQ220

The top and sides of the cover are finely painted with birds, flowers and hazelnuts on a sparkling gold ground; the individual plants may be compared with those of cat.169 and cat.171, though here the overall design is less crowded.

The base of the cover is red with a finely painted floral scroll in gold. The sides of the sliding compartment are plain black.

171

Pen box
Shiraz, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.2 × 3.9 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ393

The top and sides of the cover are finely painted with flower-and-bird designs on a black ground, though the right-hand end of the top is rather cracked. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are reddish-brown, with floral scrolls in gold.

172

Pen box
Iran, first half of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.1 × 3.8 × 3.9 cm
accession no. LAQ394

The top and sides of the cover have flower-and-bird designs, in colours that are rather paler than usual, on a dark-brown ground. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are black, with fairly elaborate medallions in gold. These are similar in shape to those found in the work of Abu Talib al-Mudarris, where they are normally decorated with an 'engine-turned' motif,[1] though in this case they are filled with small scrolls.

1. See cat.182 and 185.

173

Pen box
Iran, 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.3 × 4.3 × 3.9 cm
accession no. LAQ421

The top of the cover has a slightly confused design of birds among fruiting vines, which are set on a green ground with borders of red triangles. A similar design, rendered in a more sketchy manner, appears on the sides. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red with gold floral scrolls. The style of painting is competent but quick and cursive.



167

164

Pen box
Shiraz, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.3 × 4 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ416

The top and sides of the cover have a solid dark-maroon ground and are decorated with a series of flower-and-bird compositions of some refinement. The top has three arranged horizontally in a row: a rose bush with double flowers and another with single flowers flank a combination of a hazel tree bearing nuts and a fruit tree in blossom; there are four small birds and three coloured insects, and each plant grows out of a grassy knoll. On either side, two birds are perched where a hazel tree with nuts and a fruit tree with dark-pink flowers meet; here too, there is a grassy knoll. The ends have two flowering plants, a poppy and a marigold, and at one end the design is composed in such a way that it fits within the shape of the cap.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are black and are framed by a border with a conventional flower pattern in gold, different in each case. A third such pattern runs around the top of the cap.

Notable care was taken in the design of this decoration and its execution. The style is that of Lutf 'Ali Khan Shirazi, and the box may have been painted by him. Although the manner of painting shows heavier modelling than in the case of cat.158, and is consequently closer to the recognized style of Muhammad Husayn Shirazi (see cat.151–3), this may have been due to the development of Lutf 'Ali's own painting technique.

165

Pen box
Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.8 × 3.9 × 3.8 cm
accession no. LAQ431

This pen box is decorated in the style of Luft 'Ali Shirazi with flower-and-bird designs on a sparkling dark-green ground. The compositions have a rather more relaxed air than other work of this type, for no attempt has been made to fill the entire surface with flowers. The roughly symmetrical, horizontal design on the top of the cover consists of two small birds perched on the stumps of two rose bushes that have burst into bloom; the roses are flanked by sprays of hazel with nuts, which are also visited by birds. Hazel sprays also occur at the centre of each side, flanked by a marigold and a poppy, while a tiny blossoming fruit tree occupies each end. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are plain black, with a narrow border of gold scrollwork. In this and in the type of design employed on the principal surfaces this box is very similar to cat.164.

166

Pen box
Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.3 × 4.1 × 3.9 cm
accession no. LAQ26

The unsigned decoration of this pen box is in the style of Lutf 'Ali Shirazi. It draws on the flower-and-bird repertory and is painted on an olive-brown ground. The design on the top consists of five small birds, one of which is asleep, perched among rose blossoms, while the sides have sprays of a variety of flowers, including roses, carnations, poppies and tulips. The base of the cover is decorated with gold grapevine scrolls on a red ground (compare cat.160), while the sides of the sliding compartment have gold floral scrollwork on red.



166









64, 165









162, 163









o, 161

158

Pen box
Shiraz, AH 1270 (AD 1853–4)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.3 × 3.9 × 4.1 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The most humble Lutf 'Ali'
accession no. LAQ425

The decoration of this pen box is of exquisite quality. The top and sides of the cover have a solid black ground, and the top is decorated with a vertical composition of three birds perched on the branches of three intertwining bushes – a single rose, a double rose and a fruit tree in blossom. At the base of the design, where the three stems meet, there are marigolds and a hyacinth. The design represents an unusual solution to the problem of setting a flower-and-bird theme on the long, narrow top of a pen box, and it appears to be part of the same artistic endeavour as the main design on cat.164, which may also be by Lutf 'Ali, and the design on the base of cat.155, which he signed. The similarity to cat.164 is even closer on the sides, where cat.158 has a single bird perched in twinning hazel bushes. At either end a group of flowers – including poppies, marigolds, carnations, roses and jasmine – are combined in a heady bouquet, which was adapted to fit the shape of the cap.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are black and are decorated in gold with grape-vine motifs. On the base, these take the form of three separate vines arranged in elongated compartments; on the sides of the sliding compartment the vine forms a continuous pattern.

Cat.158 may be used to identify another work of Lutf 'Ali – an unsigned pen box with a similar vertical design on the top of the cover.[1] Here, though, the birds were replaced by curious human figures, drawn in the style of this artist (compare cat.157). An echo of this design can also be detected in the vertical flower-and-bird design with two cats on cat.159.

1. Robinson 1985, no.165.

159

Pen box
Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.6 × 3.9 × 3.6 cm
accession no. LAQ195

The top and the sides of the cover display flower-and-bird designs on a black ground. The design on the top has two unusual features: it is in the vertical format (compare cat.158), and, at the base, two cats are shown trying to climb the intertwining stems of the bushes. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are painted in gold with two types of floral scrollwork on a red ground.

The decoration must be the work of Lutf 'Ali Shirazi.

160

Pen box
Shiraz, AH 1276 (AD 1859–60)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.2 × 4 × 3.8 cm; the sliding compartment contains a brass inkpot with a silver top.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Lutf 'Ali.'
accession no. LAQ253

The top of the cover has a flower-and-bird design on a sparkling dark-brown ground. Similar designs on the sides are interrupted by four oval portrait busts of European girls and youths, and there are scenes with buildings at either end.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with elegant vine scrolls, in gold on red (compare cat.166 and 167).

161

Pen box
Shiraz, AH 1279 (AD 1862–3)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.2 × 3.7 × 4 cm.
The decoration is signed, in *ṭughrā* form, 'Painted by the most humble slave Lutf 'Ali al-Shirazi.'
accession no. LAQ25

The top and sides of the cover have a sparkling black ground and are exquisitely painted in a rather unusual manner, for the flowers depicted – roses, hydrangeas, irises, hyacinths, narcissi and others – do not grow from the base line or from stalks, but are arranged in massed groups suspended in mid-air, although they are still inhabited by birds in the traditional manner. There are three such groups arranged horizontally on the top of the box and one on either side; those on the sides are extended laterally by chains of flowers that run round the ends of the box. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated in gold with two types of floral scrollwork on a red ground.

The cap was restored in 1945 by Ghulam Riza Taqavi, according to an inscription on the inside of the cover.

162

Pen box
Shiraz, AH 1279 (AD 1862–3)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.4 × 4.2 × 4.2 cm.
The decoration is signed in *ṭughrā* form, 'Painted by the most humble slave Lutf 'Ali al-Shirazi.'
accession no. LAQ412

The top and sides of this pen box are painted with birds among blossoming rose bushes and fruit trees, on a striated ground of translucent red. The texture of the background was achieved by wrapping thin metal strips around the top and sides of the cover, in a similar fashion to cat.37. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have a red ground and are decorated with gold floral scrolls of superior quality, which run between narrow borders of a gold repeating design on black.

163

Pen box
Shiraz, AH 1275 (AD 1858–9)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23 × 4 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The most humble ... Lutf 'Ali'
acquired Sotheby's, London, 11 October 1982, lot no.160
accession no. LAQ272

The colourful design of flowers, hazelnuts and birds that decorates the top and sides of the cover is painted on a sparkling black ground. Those on the sides are arranged in a traditional manner, but the composition on the top is based on three massed groups of flowers not dissimilar from those on cat.161. Flower-and-bird compositions also decorate the base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment. That on the base is arranged vertically and is painted in gold and a lightly sparkling red on a maroon ground; the two on the sides of the sliding compartment are painted in gold on a dark-red ground. The base of the sliding compartment shows a series of tower-like buildings in a landscape, painted in gold on a red ground.







157 back of case



157 front of case with shutter



157 inner face of shutter

156

Binding of a Qur'an
Shiraz, AH 1269 (AD 1852–3)

Papier-mâché boards, each 35.2 × 22.7 cm.
The decoration is signed on the upper cover, in *ṭughrā* form, 'Painted by the most humble Lutf 'Ali.'
accession no. QUR914

The large Qur'an to which this binding is attached is not signed. The marginal commentary, however, was written in AH 1272 (AD 1856) by Mahmud ibn Visal, that is, the son of Muhammad Shafi' Visal Shirazi whose pen-name was Hakim.[1]

The outer covers have a central panel with a sparkling, dark-brown ground, which is beautifully painted with a design showing two birds in a rose-bush, with a group of other flowers at the base. The two compositions, which are not identical, are surrounded by a multiple border whose main element consists of panels of roses on a gold ground.

The doublures have a large iris plant on a ground imitating tortoise-shell. The triple border consists of inscriptions in *naskh* on a green ground between narrow bands of a repeating diaper pattern in gold on red. The inscription on the doublure of the upper cover consists of a quotation from the Qur'an (II, verses 255–7), followed by the phrase, 'God, the Sublime, the Mighty, has spoken truthfully, and his messenger, the noble Prophet, has spoken truthfully'. The inscription on the doublure of the lower cover consists of two phrases, with another quotation from the Qur'an (II, verse 201) between.

1. For work by Visal, see Safwat 1996, p.218, and p.114 for work by his son.

157

Mirror case with shutter
Shiraz, AH 1282 (AD 1865–6)

Rectangular papier mâché case, 25.6 × 16.6 cm, and fitted shutter, 22.8 × 13.8 cm. The decoration at the bottom of the outer face of the shutter is signed in *ṭughrā* form, 'Painted by the sinful slave Lutf 'Ali', and on the back of the case, also in *ṭughrā* form, 'Painted by the most humble slave Lutf 'Ali.'
accession no. LAQ348

On the back of the case and the outer face of the shutter the main field has a sparkling dark-brown ground and is surrounded by a double border with a wine-red and a green ground. In each case the main field is filled with a similar but not identical composite design. In the centre there is a spiralling chain of flowers inhabited by small birds; the edges of each element have been pricked in the same way as they have, for example, on cat.62. The flowers are framed by two vines, which grow from the base of the field, where symmetrical groups of figures of both sexes are depicted gathering grapes; the figures wear what was clearly intended as European dress. At the top, a large military band of about 40 players is arranged in three groups.

The inner face of the shutter bears a depiction of the Holy Family – the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph and the Holy Child – with two female attendants. They are shown in a landscape with trees and a large building.

As well as the signature of Lutf 'Ali and the date, this object bears a dedication at the top of the outer face of the shutter, stating that the mirror case was made 'for his excellency, high in power and glorious in deeds, Muhammadquli Khan Ilkhani – May his life be long-lasting!'. Muhammadquli Khan Qashqa'i was born in AH 1224 (AD 1809–10) and became one of the most important political figures in Fars in the 19th century. He died in AH 1284 (AD 1867–8).[1]

1. Bamdad 1347–50, III, p.471. See also p.206, above.





157 details of outer face of shutter (above) and back of case (below)



156 doublure



156 upper cover







155 top and side of cover; side of sliding compartment



155 base

Cat.156–8 and 160–63 were signed by Lutf 'Ali Shirazi, who was one of the leading painters of Shiraz in the mid-19th century, producing many watercolour studies on paper and manuscript illustrations as well as lacquer wares. According to a contemporary, Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi, 'The late Lutf 'Ali Khan was related to the line of the late Hajji Mushir al-Mulk', that is, Mirza Abu'l-Hasan Khan Mushir al-Mulk, who was governor of Fars for six terms between AH 1262 (AD 1846–7) and his death in 1882.[1] 'Although he also worked as a figure-painter (*ṣūratgar*), his flower-painting (*gul u būtah-sāzī*) was unrivalled in the entire world, and no predecessor nor successor has shown the same skill. He died in 1288', that is, AD 1871–2, 'and was buried in the cemetery in Shiraz – may God grant him mercy! Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Khan Mas'ud al-Mulk, a fine calligrapher and literary stylist and a man unequalled in good qualities, is a well-favoured son worthy of his late father.'[2]

The painter's grandson, Dr Lutf 'Ali Suratgar, was told by his father that his grandfather was about 65 years old at the time of his death; on that basis it would appear that the elder Lutf 'Ali was born in the 1800s.[3] Lutf 'Ali's earliest dated work so far published is a fine watercolour study of a hand holding a spray of roses, which he inscribed with his characteristic signature in *ṭughrā* form and the date AH 1257 (AD 1841–2),[4] and he produced a bookbinding decorated with floral compositions in the same year.[5] The latest piece known is cat.157 below, which was made in AH 1282 (AD 1865–6), six years before he died. A few years earlier, in AH 1278, the ageing artist signed a floral study with a complaint, 'It was when the weather was cold, my hand was cold, my back was cold, and my heart was cold, on Wednesday 6 Rajab' – equivalent to 7 January 1862 – 'that the most humble Lutf 'Ali made it.'[6]

Lutf 'Ali Suratgar portrayed his grandfather as a committed realist and describes how one of the leaders of the Qashqa'i of Fars took him to live with the nomads for a year so that he could draw their costumes from life.[7] This story would seem to be at variance with the idealized subject-matter of Lutf 'Ali's works in the Khalili Collection and elsewhere. In fact a more credible version of the episode was related by Sayyid Ahmad Divanbegi Shirazi in his *Ḥadīqat al-shu'arā'* ('Garden of poets'), which shows that Lutf 'Ali's sojourn among the Qashqa'i had nothing to do with the quest for realism. The calligrapher, painter and poet Muhammad Davari ibn Muhammad Visal Shirazi, who died in AH 1282 (AD 1865–6),[8] spent nearly five years copying, illuminating, illustrating and binding a *Shāhnāmah* manuscript in collaboration with his younger brother Farhang. During that time he was unable to find a client, until Muhammadquli Khan Qashqa'i undertook to purchase it for 700 *tūmāns* in cash, two Kashmiri shawls and two horses. But two sections of the manuscript had been left unfinished, and Muhammadquli Khan therefore commissioned Lutf 'Ali and another painter, Mirza Aqa Naqqash, to complete them: 'he invited them to visit him and kept them by him, in summer camp and winter camp, for two years, and he selected two other men, both illuminators, to assist them'.[9] Divanbegi was a friend of Davari and Farhang's family, and he seems to have exaggerated their contribution to the illustration of the *Shāhnāmah*, for most of the miniatures, which were executed between AH 1270 (AD 1853–4) and AH 1280 (AD 1863–4), were signed by Lutf 'Ali.[10]

Muhammadquli Khan Qashqa'i was made paramount chief (*īlkhānī*) of the tribes of Fars in AH 1268 (AD 1851–2),[11] and the story of his sponsorship of the completion of Muhammad Davari's *Shāhnāmah* indicates that he was a serious patron of the arts.[12] His patronage of Lutf 'Ali is confirmed by the mirror case cat.157, which the artist decorated for the Khan in AH 1282 (AD 1865–6).

1. Hasan Fasa'i–Busse, pp.424–5.
2. Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi 1362, p.548.
3. Quoted in Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.561.
4. Robinson 1967, no.98, and pl.36; 1979, fig.240; 1991, pl.34(b).
5. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.566.
6. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.565. This complaint is reminiscent of the long inscriptions Mu'in Musavvir placed on his works on paper (see Farhad 1990).
7. Quoted in Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.561.
8. Bayani 1345–58, III, pp.712–16, no.1020.
9. Quoted in Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.562, n.1.
10. Robinson 1967, pp.76–7; 1979, p.356; 1991, p.886, and pl.34(a). See also Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.568.
11. Bamdad 1347–50, III, p.471.
12. See Hasan Fasa'i, as quoted by Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.562, n.2.

155

Pen box
Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.2 × 3.9 × 3.5 cm.
The decoration of the base is signed, 'Lutf 'Ali al-Shirazi'
accession no. LAQ408

The top and sides of the cover have brightly coloured flower-and-bird designs on a sparkling, dark-brown ground, and their decoration may be attributed to Muhammad Husayn Shirazi. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment display even finer work, which was signed by Lutf 'Ali Shirazi. They have a black ground, on which an undulating vine stem is painted in colours. On the base, the vine is arranged as a vertical composition, with a bird at the base and a butterfly at the top, while on the sliding compartment it forms a continuous pattern.









153, 154









51, 152

149

Pen box
Perhaps Shiraz, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.7 × 4.3 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ46

The top and sides of the cover show birds and butterflies among roses, apple-blossom, carnations, hazelnuts and other plants, all very finely painted on a marbled crimson ground. The base of the cover and sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with gold scrollwork on black.

The marbled pattern of the background has traces of the fleshy, leaf-like forms associated with the work of Rajab 'Ali and Abu Talib al-Mudarris (see cat.177 and 178, for example).

150

Pen box
Perhaps Shiraz, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25 × 4.5 × 4.7 cm
accession no. LAQ338

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with flower-and-bird designs on an exceptionally rich ground imitating tortoise-shell, in which gold was used as the background colour instead of the more usual yellow (compare cat.154). The effect seems to have been the result of an experiment, but it was not particularly successful, as it is now difficult to read the flower and bird motifs (compare cat.156). The base is red, with gold-ruled edges. The decoration of the sides of the sliding compartment, which are covered with 'engine-turned' designs (single wavy lines), is in the style normally associated with Abu Talib al-Mudarris (see cat.180 and 185, for example).

An interesting feature of this pen box is the shape of the cap or *qufl*, the sides of which come to a point near the base. Cat.45 above shows that caps of this shape were made in an earlier period to fit a design in which the sides of the cover were divided into compartments. It may be that cat.150 is an 18th-century pen box that was repainted in the 19th century: such a circumstance would explain the unusually thick and uneven character of the lacquered surface.

151

Pen box
Perhaps Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.5 × 3.8 × 3.6 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī* ('O Husayn son of 'Ali!')
accession no. LAQ175

The top and sides of the cover are painted with birds, butterflies, flowers and vines on a rich dark-red ground. The painting displays greater originality than is usual in this group; a wider variety of birds is represented (they include a duck and a partridge looking up at an oversized hyacinth), and the novel bird-and-vine motif on the cap has been cleverly adapted to fit the space. The base has a flower-and-bird motif executed in gold on a black ground. The sides of the sliding compartment are also black, with a gold floral scroll.

The invocation 'O Husayn son of 'Ali!' is thought to have been employed as a signature by Muhammad Husayn Shirazi, whose father Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi signed himself *Yā Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ('O Commander of the Faithful!'), as on cat.145. Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi has recorded work by Muhammad Husayn dated between AH 1270 (AD 1853–4) and AH 1289 (AD 1872–3) and signed with a variety of invocations to the Imam Husayn.[1]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.704–6, no.1001.

152

Pen box
Perhaps Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.8 × 3.8 × 3.7 cm; with a silver-gilt inkpot and a silver bird-headed spike.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī* ('O Husayn son of 'Ali!')
accession no. LAQ254

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with a colourful design of birds, butterflies and hazelnuts on a mottled ground of black and red. A similar texturing, in green and black, was used on the base of the cover, as well as on the external surfaces of the sliding compartment.

153

Pen box
Perhaps Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché case and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.2 × 3.9 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī* ('O Husayn son of 'Ali!')
accession no. LAQ317

Like cat.151 and cat.152, this pen box is inscribed with the invocation, 'O Husayn, son of 'Ali!', which is thought to have been used by the artist Muhammad Husayn Shirazi.

The top and sides of the cover are finely painted with birds, butterflies and flowers on a coffee-coloured ground which has been lightly sprinkled with gold. The base is brown and is decorated in gold with a design similar to that on the base of cat.151; the blossoming branches have been replaced by a fruiting vine. The sides of the sliding compartment are black, and an abbreviated version of the design on the base of cat.151 has been placed at the centre of each side.

154

Pen box
Perhaps Shiraz, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.4 × 3.9 cm
accession no. LAQ77

This box is very finely painted in the style of Muhammad Husayn Shirazi, with birds and butterflies among single and double roses, hyacinths, hazelnuts and other flowers on a ground that simulates tortoise-shell. The ground from which the individual stems grow is indicated by small, flower-covered knolls. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with gold vine-scrolls on a red ground.









49, 150



148 front of case with shutter



147 front of case with shutter



147 detail of inner face of one shutter

145

Pen box
Shiraz, AH 1242 (AD 1826–7)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.7 × 3.7 × 3.5 cm.
The decoration is inscribed,
Yā Amīr al-Mu'minīn
('O Commander of the Faithful!')
accession no. LAQ205

The top and sides of the cover are finely painted with flowers and birds on a sparkling ground of a dark, greenish hue, and the red base is decorated with an overall pattern of fruiting vine scrolls in gold. The sides of the sliding compartment are also red and are painted in gold with a series of individual flowering plants.

The presence of the invocation 'O Commander of the Faithful!' indicates that the pen box is the work of Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi, who was also responsible for cat.147.[1] He was probably a pupil of Muhammad Baqir, the painter of cat.76, and he had a son called Muhammad Husayn (see cat.152–4).

Muhammad 'Ali was known to Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi: 'The late Aqa Muhammad 'Ali, too, attained the utmost degree of perfection in flower painting. His death occurred in Shiraz in 1285', equivalent to AD 1868–9, 'and he was buried in the Dar al-Salam.' The date on cat.145 suggests that it comes from the early years of Muhammad 'Ali's career.

1. Boroumand 1366, p.158; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.926–7, no.1108.
2. Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi, p.548.

146

Pen box
Shiraz, second quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.1 × 4.1 × 3.5 cm
accession no. LAQ206

The decoration of the top and sides of this pen box – flowers, hazelnuts and birds on a sparkling black ground – is similar to that on cat.145. The execution, however, is not as refined, and the decoration of the base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment, which consists of conventional floral scrollwork in gold on a red ground, is quite different.

147

Double mirror case with shutters
Shiraz, before AH 1285 (AD 1868–9)

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 19.7 × 13.3 cm, and hinged, wooden shutters, 18.5 × 11.6 cm, with silver hinges and hasps on the short sides. The decoration is signed, 'Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi', on both shutters.
accession no. LAQ477

The outer faces of both shutters are finely painted with birds perched on luxuriant rose bushes, with other flowers below. The background is of powdered gold, and there is a border of verses in white *nasta'līq* script, set in cartouches with a black ground. The verses were chosen for their relevance to this object, as in both cases they consist of five distichs from a mystic poem whose rhyme ends with the word *āyinah* ('mirror'), which forms the grammatical subject of each line.

The first verse may be translated, 'The mirror is where the traces of the beauty of God's creation are made manifest; the mirror is where the sun formed from the light-filled beings of the virtuous rises.' The second and third verses have been partially obliterated by the hinges, while the fourth verse varies. That on one side contains two references to Yusuf (that is, Joseph, son of Jacob), who is counted as a paragon of male beauty: 'The mirror conceals the bright and beautiful pearl of Egypt; it is the moon of Canaan at the bottom of the well of the chin.' That on the other side is more explicit: 'Sometimes the mirror comes face to face with down and mole and tress and cheek; sometimes it speaks of God's creation.' The fifth verse is, 'The mirror shows both the crescent moon and the sun to the beautiful; what a paradise is the mirror, because of the arched eyebrow of the face!'

The inner face of one shutter shows the Imam 'Ali seated between his two sons, with two cherubs in the sky above. This scene is set in a central oval panel, on a background of black, filled with conventional floral scrolls in gold and four lobed medallions containing two texts referring to 'Ali: at the top the invocation, 'There is no youth but 'Ali! There is no sword but Dhu'l-Faqar!'; and at the bottom a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, 'I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali is its gate.'

The inner face of the the other shutter is mounted, under glass, with a page of rich illumination that combines Qur'anic and other texts with magic letters in a composition that was ascribed certain powers. The title (in red *thulth* in the gold cartouche at the top) announces that the page bears a 'Depiction of the seal of prophecy …', that is, of the birthmark between Muhammad's shoulder-blades. In the upper part of the page there is a roundel with magic letters at its centre and Qur'anic quotations (LXVIII, verses 51–2; XII, parts of verse 64) and other texts in its border. It is framed by invocations to four angels, Jibra'il, Mika'il, 'Azra'il and Israfil. In the lower part of the page there is a larger oval device filled with a quotation from the surah *al-Nūr* ('The light'; XXIV, verse 35). It is framed by four pairs of invocations to God, and the frame around it contains a text in red *thulth* on gold, which describes the efficacy of the representation of the seal of prophecy:

'The powers ascribed to the seal of prophecy by the Commander of the Faithful' – that is, the Imam 'Ali – 'are reported to be that whoever looks at the seal of prophecy after the midday prayer shall have the reward of someone who has performed the Hajj one hundred thousand times in the company of Abraham; whoever looks at it after the morning prayer shall have the reward of someone who has performed the Hajj fifty times in the company of Adam; whoever looks at it after the afternoon prayer shall have the reward of someone who has performed the Hajj three hundred times in the company of Jonah; and whoever looks at it after the dusk prayer shall have the reward of someone who has performed the Hajj seven hundred times in the company of Jesus. That person shall be safe from … the exiguities of the grave.'[1]

The outer frame contains the Throne Verse (II, verse 255), which is followed by the date 1300 (AD 1882–3). This date suggests that the page was added some time after the case was painted, for Fursat al-Dawlah Shirazi reported that Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi died in AH 1285 (AD 1868–9).[2]

1. For further analysis of this page, see Maddison & Savage-Smith, forthcoming.
2. See cat.145.

148

Mirror case with shutter
Perhaps Shiraz, *circa* 1875

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 24.6 × 16.6 cm, and hinged shutter, 21.8 × 13.8 cm; silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ475

The back of the case and the outer face of the shutter are finely painted with flower-and-bird designs on a brown ground, set within a double frame of floral motifs.

An oval panel on the inner face of the shutter shows 'Ali and his two sons, seated on a terrace. They are attended by two greybeards, and there are cherubs in the sky above. The background round the oval is black and is decorated with sprays of roses.

This mirror case may be compared with cat.147, which is signed by Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi, although the flower-and-bird painting is closer to 18th-century models.









45, 146





143, 144

144

Pen box
Iran, *circa* 1830

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 28 × 5.5 × 5 cm
accession no. LAQ163
published Boroumand 1366, pls 29–32

The decoration of this pen box shows some original ideas but its execution is unrefined. It was probably inspired by the work of Mulla 'Ali Muhammad (see cat.141–3 above), but it does not seem to be his work.

The top and sides of the cover have a pale-yellow ground, on which oval medallions with bust portraits of young women alternate with a great variety of animal motifs worked in monochrome, some set on a black ground within lobed cartouches. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with two types of floral scrollwork in gold on a brick-orange ground.





3, 144

143
Pen box
Iran, early 19th century

Papier-mâché base and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 27.7 × 5.3 × 5 cm
accession no. LAQ261

A panel of grisaille running the length of the top of the cover shows animals preying on one another, enormous butterflies, and men standing on a curious building, which, given the presence of fish below it, is probably meant to be a bridge. The panel is surrounded by a wide green border. This is decorated with conventional gold scrollwork and a series of black, eight-pointed stars; each contains a small vignette in grisaille, alternately an animal or a pair of animals and a flower. There are large cartouches of the same type at either end; they show a hawk taking a duck and a crane with a ribbon in its bill. The sides have a similar style of decoration, with birds and flowers in panels. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with two types of gold floral scrollwork on a red ground.

This piece may be attributed to Mulla 'Ali Muhammad.



141, 142

142

Pen box
Iran, early 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 21.8 × 3.8 × 3.5 cm
accession no. LAQ378

The individual and rather primitive style of decoration on this box, in grisaille on a coffee-brown ground, may be attributed to Mulla 'Ali Muhammad.

The horizontal composition on the top of the cover shows two lions and a leopard seizing their prey, an ibex, a buffalo, and a small felid; three large butterflies also appear. Small gold scrolls fill the intervening ground (compare cat. 141). The sides are painted with flowers and birds in compartments; the black ground is filled with conventional floral motifs in gold.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are deep red, and are decorated in gold with two types of floral scrollwork.





41, 142

141

Pen box
Iran, AH 1231 (AD 1815–16)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.4 × 4 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of the maker, Muhammad Baqir ibn Ja'far al-Husayni; the decoration is signed, 'Mulla 'Ali Muhammad'
accession no. LAQ19

The top of the cover is painted in monochrome black on a background of a yellowish hue. A leopard attacking a wild ass, a hawk attacking an ibex, and a dragon attacking a stag are arranged in a horizontal sequence, with ducks and butterflies populating the spaces around them. The design is set off with small scroll-like motifs in gold.

The sides are decorated with conventionalized carnations and other flowers, with birds and butterflies between; one of the birds is seizing a snake. The base has gold scrollwork on a red ground, and the sides of the sliding compartment display a rather roughly painted floral design, in colours on red.

The painter of this box has previously been recorded as Mulla Muhammad 'Ali or Mulla 'Ali,[1] as well as Mulla 'Ali Muhammad on the basis of a pen box of AH 1235 (AD 1819–20);[2] its date supports the reading of the date on this box, which appears in the form '12301', as AH 1231. In addition, an octagonal mirror case in a private collection in France bears the same signature and date as cat. 141 and is in the same remarkably individual style.

The maker's seal on the inside of the cover is slightly damaged, but it is identical to that on cat. 84 above, which is intact.[3]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp. 1207–9, no. 1261.
2. Boroumand 1366, p. 110.
3. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.



140 lower cover

140

Binding of a devotional manuscript
Probably Shiraz, AH 1240 (AD 1824–5)

Papier-mâché boards, each 20.5 × 13.2 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the pen of 'Ali, the servant of the Shah's majesty.'
accession no. MSS211

The binding is attached to a book of prayers with a dedication dated AH 1247 (AD 1831–2) from 'Abbas Mirza, the son of Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar, to his son Muhammad Mirza, who later ruled as Muhammad Shah. The book also bears an impression of the seal of 'Abbas Mirza, dated AH 1214 (AD 1799–1800).

The covers bear a fine design of massed flowers and gold tendrils on an imitation-tortoiseshell ground. This composition is framed by a triple border, with a floral repeat pattern on black between two narrower bands of gold floral scrolls, also on black. The doublures have a red ground decorated with large floral scrolls in gold and enclosed by a narrow black border.

There are no published pieces signed in the same manner as cat.140, but a book cover inscribed with a very similar signature and dated one year later, in AH 1241 (AD 1825–6), may be the work of the same 'Ali.[1] This painter may be identified with Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi (see cat.145 and 147, below).

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p. 364, no. 635.



139 lower cover

139

Binding of a Qur'an
Iran or Afghanistan, AH 1229 (AD 1814)

Papier-mâché boards, each 18.6 × 10.2 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn* ('O Imam Zayn al-'Abidin!'); the inscriptions are signed, 'Written by 'Abd al-Ghafur al-Harawi.'
accession no. QUR205

The Qur'an to which this binding is attached was copied by 'Abd al-Ghafur ibn Muhammad Haydar al-Harawi in AH 1229 (AD 1814), for Shaykh Muhammad Isma'il Khan Jami. The same scribe signed the border of inscriptions on the outer covers.

Each cover is decorated with a central panel that contains an arrangement of various flowers on a gold ground; the lobed corner-pieces are



139 detail of doublure

green, and filled with stylized floral designs. There is a border of *naskh* inscriptions on a black ground. These consist of four *ḥadīths* relating to the recitation of the Qur'an. The doublures have a red ground, decorated with gold scrollwork and framed by a similar border.

It is not certain which artist using the invocation *Yā Imām Zayn al-'Ābidīn* as his signature was responsible for the flower painting on cat.139. One possibility is that he was Zayn al-'Abidin Afshar, who is known to have painted a lacquer binding in the Majlis Library in AH 1235 (AD 1819–20).[1] But the *nisbahs* of the scribe and the patron of the manuscript, 'of Herat' and 'of Jam', suggest an Afghan provenance, which would account for the unusual combination of elements in the design of the covers.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.214–15, no.410.



138 doublure





138 outer covers

138

Binding of a manuscript
Shiraz, AH 1230 (AD 1815)

Papier-mâché boards, 20.3 × 12.1 cm. The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Muhammad Hadi.'
accession no. MSS773
published Sotheby's, London, 12 October 1990, lot no. 294

This binding is attached to a copy of the *Yusuf and Zulaykha* of Jami, made by Sayyid 'Ali al-Husayni on Wednesday 5 Shawwal 1234 (28 July 1819). The outer covers are painted with very fine designs of rose sprays and carnations on a coffee-brown ground, framed by a black border with gold flowers. The doublures are decorated with accomplished renditions of single iris plants on a red ground, and these too must be the work of the great master Muhammad Hadi.

The Shirazi painter Muhammad Hadi is best known from an account by an English official of the East India Company, Claudius James Rich, who met him in Shiraz on 10 September 1821. Rich wrote to his wife, 'I have just had a visit from Mirza Mohammed Hadi, the most distinguished artist in Persia. I was indebted for this honour to his having heard that "amch'io son pittore", and that I had praised some of his works. He was accompanied by a khan, and one or two of his choicest disciples. He enjoys the highest reputation here, and the Persians almost consider him in odour of sanctity. I found him an extremely polite, intelligent, gentlemanlike old man. He is full of the spirit of his art, and is passionately fond of flowers. This Iranian Van Huysum never works now; and it is almost impossible to procure a specimen of his pencil. They are bought up at any price by the Persians. He has not even preserved a specimen for himself, yet by great good fortune I have got one exquisite little painting of his for you'.[1] Although Rich claimed that Muhammad Hadi had given up work, Karimzadeh Tabrizi has recorded a pen box that was signed by him and dated AH 1246 (AD 1830–31).[2]

1. Quoted in Robinson 1967, no. 94.
2. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp. 1100–2, no. 1168.



137 lower cover



137 doublure

136 inner face of shutter



136 front of case with shutter



136 back of case

136

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, *circa* 1800

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 28 × 18 cm, and fitted shutter, 25.5 × 15.5 cm
accession no. LAQ14

The back of the case and the outer face of the shutter bear two variations on a flower-and-bird theme, on a sparkling, dark-brown ground. The inner face of the cover shows a lily and an iris within a frame of Persian verses in an elegant *nasta'līq* hand. As is often the case, this composition is not quite so well painted as the outer two.

The verses inscribed on the inside of the shutter are a little garbled, but they were clearly chosen primarily for the references made to mirrors. Most are addressed to the mirror itself. One hemistich, for example, reads, 'O luminous mirror, embellished with painted designs!', while the others are couched in more oblique terms: 'O you by whose agency the faces of beauteous idols are enhanced with adornments!'; and, 'You are the sun, but unlike the sun you do no rise and set; you are the revolving heavens, but unlike the heavens you have no hub or axis.' The one couplet not addressed to the mirror is from a *ghazal* by Hafiz, 'Not everyone who makes a mirror knows how to reproduce Alexander's; not everyone who puts his headgear on crooked sits down with a thump.'

This mirror case may be the work of Muhammad Hadi of Shiraz (see cat.138).

137

Pair of book covers
Iran, early 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 29 × 19 cm, with red leather spine
accession no. LAQ473

The outer covers are decorated with the same image (presented in reverse on one cover) of a fat bird asleep on a spray of roses (compare cat.135, inside of the lid), with carnations and other flowers at the base, set against a light-brown background and surrounded by a fine floral border on black.

The doublures have a red field covered with fine floral scrolls in gold. In the centre of each there is a lobed medallion, which contains a painting of two dervishes, one young and the other bearded, in a landscape. (Here too, the scene is reversed on one cover.) Each medallion is accompanied by two pendants, which contain small landscapes with buildings and bridges.



135

135

Casket

Iran, early 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body with four shallow feet and a lift-off lid with a flat top and convex sides, 32.3 × 22.7 × 16.3 cm
accession no. LAQ283

All the external surfaces of the casket are decorated with flower-and-bird designs on a sparkling gold ground, framed by bands of a repeating floral pattern.

The inside of the lid has a yellow ground. On the flat surface in the centre a fat bird is depicted perching on a flowering rose bush, while the surrounding concave surfaces are decorated with sprays of flowers and butterflies.

The base has a red ground with a black, lobed central medallion and pendants filled with gold floral scroll-work. The interior is pale green.



135 top of lid



135 inside of lid





134 outer covers



134 doublure



133 front of case with shutter

132

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, *circa* 1800

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 13.8 × 8.4 cm, and hinged shutter, 11.8 × 6.5 cm, with silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ13

The back of the case and the outer face of the shutter are finely painted with flower-and-bird designs on a sparkling dark-brown ground. The inner face of the cover bears the portrait of a young mullah, who is shown seated on a prayer-mat and holding a rosary. Behind him a window gives on to a walled courtyard with a water-tank.

133

Mirror case with shutter
Perhaps Isfahan, first half of the 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 23.2 × 15.7 cm, and fitted shutter, 20.8 × 13.2 cm
accession no. LAQ166

This mirror case is probably Isfahani work. The outer face of the shutter and the back of the case bear identical designs of flowers and birds on a sparkling dark-brown background. The inner face of the shutter is plain red.

134

Pair of book covers
Iran, early 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 28.3 × 17.8 cm
accession no. LAQ17

The outer covers have an almost identical design, although one shows it in reverse. It consists of sprays of roses, apple blossom, narcissi and carnations on a plain gold ground and is set within a black frame painted with a small repeating floral design in gold. The doublures have a red field and a gold border, which encloses a large blossoming plant, also in gold.



132 front of case with shutter



132 back of case



132 inner face of shutter



131

131

Folding backgammon board
Iran, early 19th century

Rectangular wooden base,
69 × 45 × 11.2 cm when open,
69 × 16.4 × 16.8 cm when closed,
with six metal hinges
accession no. LAQ284

The playing surface is constructed of three boards of wood laid side-by-side and connected by hinges; it is edged along the outside by a shallow flange and is raised on a series of lobed 'feet', which interlock when the board is folded, to form a rectangular box. The sides and the feet were painted with a sparkling orange ground, overlaid with large-scale floral work in gold outlined in black. The four 'tables' into which the playing surface is divided have six 'points' decorated with floral scrolls on a red ground and corner-pieces with diminutive roses on a yellow ground. The principal decoration, however, is to be found in the cruciform area between the 'tables'. Defined by a multiple border that includes a register of cartouches with a gold ground set with formal arrangements of flowers, this area contains seven panels of different shapes and sizes, each with a gilt frame of raised rococo scrollwork and set against particularly fine floral scrolls on a black ground. The central panel contains a mass of flowers on a sparkling red ground, while the others are figural. Four depict lovers in European clothes, one has a couple in Iranian dress, and the last, a woman nursing a child.

The main decoration may be attributed to the court painter Muhammad Hasan, who worked primarily in oils. He was probably not responsible for the famous, now lost, paintings in the Nigaristan Palace, as reported by S.G.W. Benjamin and other late 19th-century commentators, but two large portraits of Qajar princes that bear his signature[1] may have been part of a set of eight that flanked a portrait of the Shah in the Sultaniyyah palace.[2] He also executed a version of *Shaykh San'an and the Christian maiden*[3] and a *Mother and child with parrot*[4] and perhaps also a number of unsigned female portraits.[5] Muhammad Hasan's only known dated work is a miniature of Fath 'Ali Shah enthroned in state, of AH 1234 (AD 1818–19).[6]

1. Robinson 1964a, fig.10; Falk 1972, nos 26, 27, perhaps also no.28; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pl.53.
2. Robinson 1964a, p.104, quoting Lt Col. John Johnson, who saw them *in situ* in 1817; other signed portraits of princes are reported by Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.689–91, no.983.
3. Falk 1972, no.30; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pl.54.
4. Falk 1972, no.31.
5. Robinson 1964a, fig.11; Falk 1972, figs 17, 18, and nos 32–5.
6. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.691.



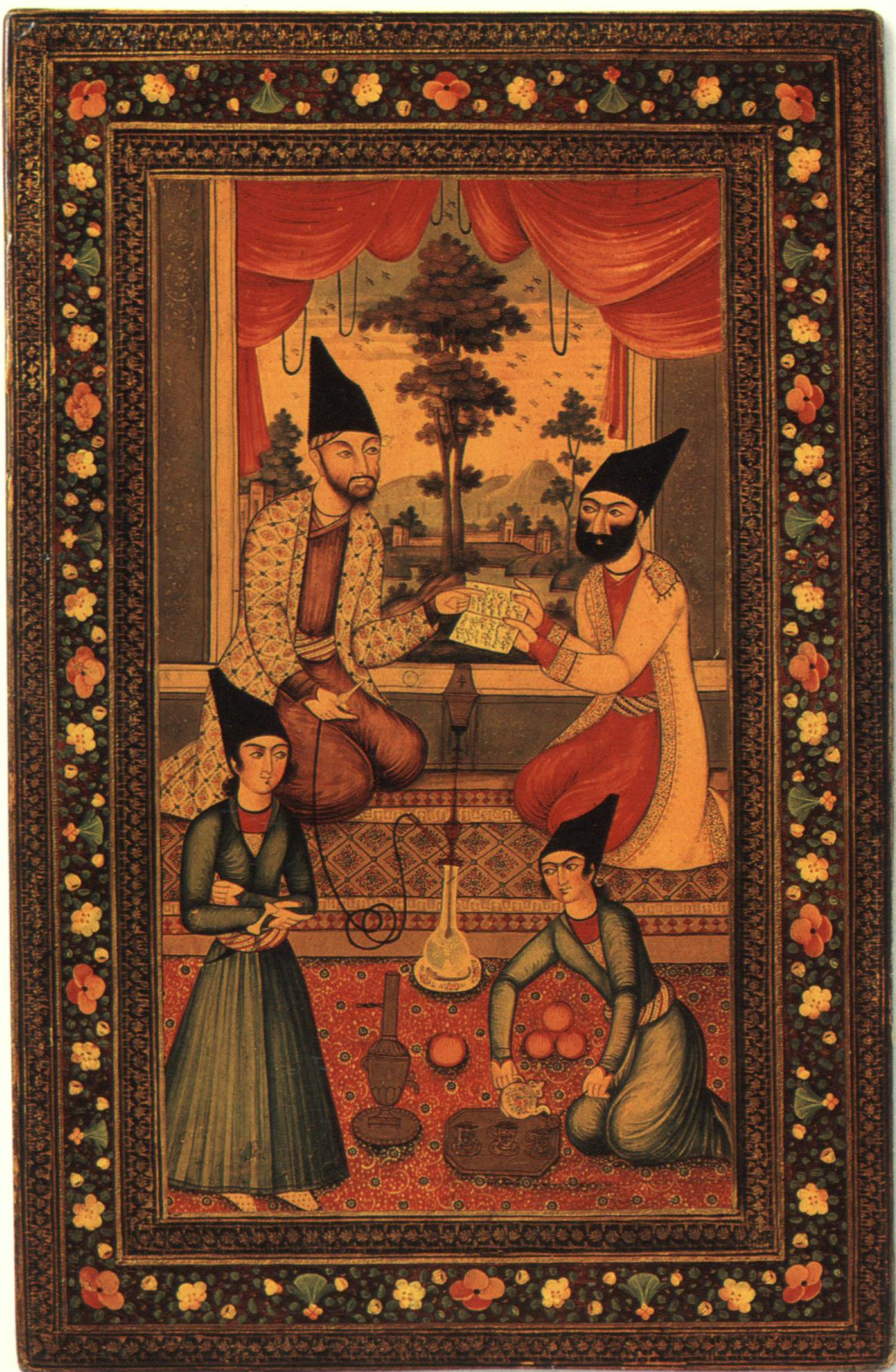
131



131



130 inner face of shutter



130 back of case



130 front of case with shutter



129 base

129

Pen box
Perhaps Tehran, Ramadan 1256
(October–November 1840)

Papier-mâché body and hinged lid with straight ends, 27.3 × 6.8 × 5.3 cm, the hinges, hasp and chains of silver. The decoration is signed within one of the inscriptions, 'Written by the servant Abu'l-Hasan.'
accession no. LAQ151

The lid is decorated inside and out with portraits of Muhammad Shah Qajar, arranged in a vertical format. In the fine portrait on the outside the Shah is shown enthroned in a landscape. That on the inside, which is of lesser quality, shows him seated and in consultation with his chief minister, Hajji Mirza Aghasi; one of the two pages in the foreground kneels before a samovar. The sides display hunting scenes, while the base is decorated with hazel bushes bearing nuts, painted in gold on a brick-orange ground.

In the scene on the inside of the lid there are two open books inscribed with Persian texts. The words on the book held by Hajji Mirza Aghasi read, 'O Helper of the Weak! If we are negligent, You are an ocean of mercy. That is enough!' The text written on the book that lies on the floor comes in two parts. On one page there is a couplet, 'Hundreds of thousands of children had their heads cut off so that Kalimallah' – *i.e.* Moses – 'could have eyes to see', followed by the signature; and on the other, 'The souls of lions and dogs are separated from one other; adjoining are the souls of the men of God', followed by the date.[1]

At least five artists called Abu'l-Hasan flourished in the 19th century.[2] The most famous was Abu'l-Hasan Khan Ghaffari Sani' al-Mulk, who is known to have been working later in the 1840s, but this pen box is probably the work of Abu'l-Hasan Isfahani, who flourished in the first half of the 19th century. If this attribution is correct, this pen box and cat.130, which may be ascribed to the same hand, are rare examples of Abu'l-Hasan's work in lacquer, for most of his recorded output consists of portraits of the Qajar elite in watercolours, such as a portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar executed in AH 1266 (AD 1849–50).[3]

1. On the character of these texts, see cat.130.
2. Khwansari 2535.
3. See Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.20, no.50.

130

Mirror case with shutter
Perhaps Tehran, *circa* 1845

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 23.4 × 15.3 cm, and fitted shutter, 21 × 12.8 cm
accession no. LAQ23

This mirror case is decorated with a series of portraits in the same style as cat.129 and is probably by the same hand. The portraits are of the same dimensions, and on the back of the case and on the outer face of the shutter the surrounding space is filled with a wide floral border.

The outer face of the shutter shows Muhammad Shah Qajar seated on a chair-like throne, with the young Crown Prince Nasir al-Din in attendance; behind them, looped curtains can be seen above a large window that gives on to a landscape with a tall tree. The inner face presents a portrait of Hajji Muhammad Husayn, son of Shaykh Zayn al-Din, who is so described in an inscription above his head. The holy man is seated against a bolster in front of a window, and holds an open book and a rosary.

The inscription on the book consists of two poetic quotations. The first reads, 'Think of the people as water, limpid and pure – in it the basis for there being a possessor of sovereign majesty is clear. Emperors are a manifestation of God's kingship; sages are a mirror of God's wisdom.' The second, rather curiously entitled 'A hemistich', is, 'Amazement within amazement emerged from these stories, most particularly the loss of their senses by those set apart. If Ahmad, that glorious master, releases himself from reality, Gabriel will remain astounded for ever.'

The open book in front of Hajji Muhammad Husayn is inscribed with further Persian verses: 'It would be admissable for a tree to say, "I am the truth!" Why, then, should it not be admissable from a man blessed by good fortune? To say "I am the truth!" is to reveal an absolute secret. Who other than God can say it?'

The third portrait, that on the back of the case, is of the minister Hajji Mirza Aghasi, who is again shown seated in front of a window. The minister holds the mouthpiece of his kalian in his right hand, while he points to a document held by a secretary with the other. In the foreground are two young pages, one of whom is pouring tea.

The text on the document is again a poetic quotation, 'My soul at this moment is beyond speech. Anything I say is based upon my state of mystic entrancement. You see an image in a mirror, but what you see is your image and not the mirror. The creed of the adepts of mystic love differs from other beliefs; the doctrine and creed of the adepts is God.'

All the poetry used on this piece gives unusually strong expression to the Sufi tradition of mystic thought, which was the subject of brutal repression in Iran from the 17th until the early 19th century. In the 1830s and 1840s Sufism underwent a revival under the patronage of Muhammad Shah and his mentor, Hajji Mirza Aghasi, who served as his chief minister between 1835 and the Shah's death in 1848. This mirror case is therefore a token of a major change in Qajar court culture and presents portraits of the most important figures involved in effecting that change.

Another mirror case decorated by Abu'l-Hasan with portraits of Muhammad Shah and Hajji Mirza Aghasi was recorded by Adib Boroumand. It is dated AH 1260 (AD 1844–5).[1]

1. Boroumand 1366, p.115.



129 top and inside of lid



128 doublure

128

Pair of book covers
Isfahan, AH 1262 (AD 1845–6)

Papier-mâché boards, each 26.9 × 19.9 cm
accession no. LAQ29

These covers are unsigned, but they may be the work of Zayn al-'Abidin Isfahani.[1] If so, they are the earliest dated examples of his work so far published.

The outer covers are almost identical in design, one being reversed from the other. They bear a mass of roses, narcissi, carnations and other flowers on a sparkling, dark-brown ground, with birds perched amid the blooms. The border of floral panels is divided by quatrefoils very similar to those on the sliding compartments of the pen boxes cat. 42 and LAQ28.[2]

One doublure shows Fath 'Ali Shah on the Peacock Throne, attended by two young princes, two ministers and a young *ghulām*. The other shows his successor, Muhammad Shah, seated on a chair-like throne on the same terrace; he is attended by the young Crown Prince Nasir al-Din, two ministers and two young courtiers. One of the ministers is Hajji Mirza Aghasi (see cat. 129 and 130), who offers the Shah a golden globe inscribed in compartments with the names of the planets.

The monarchs are identified by the inscriptions at the top of each doublure, which are accompanied by the date.

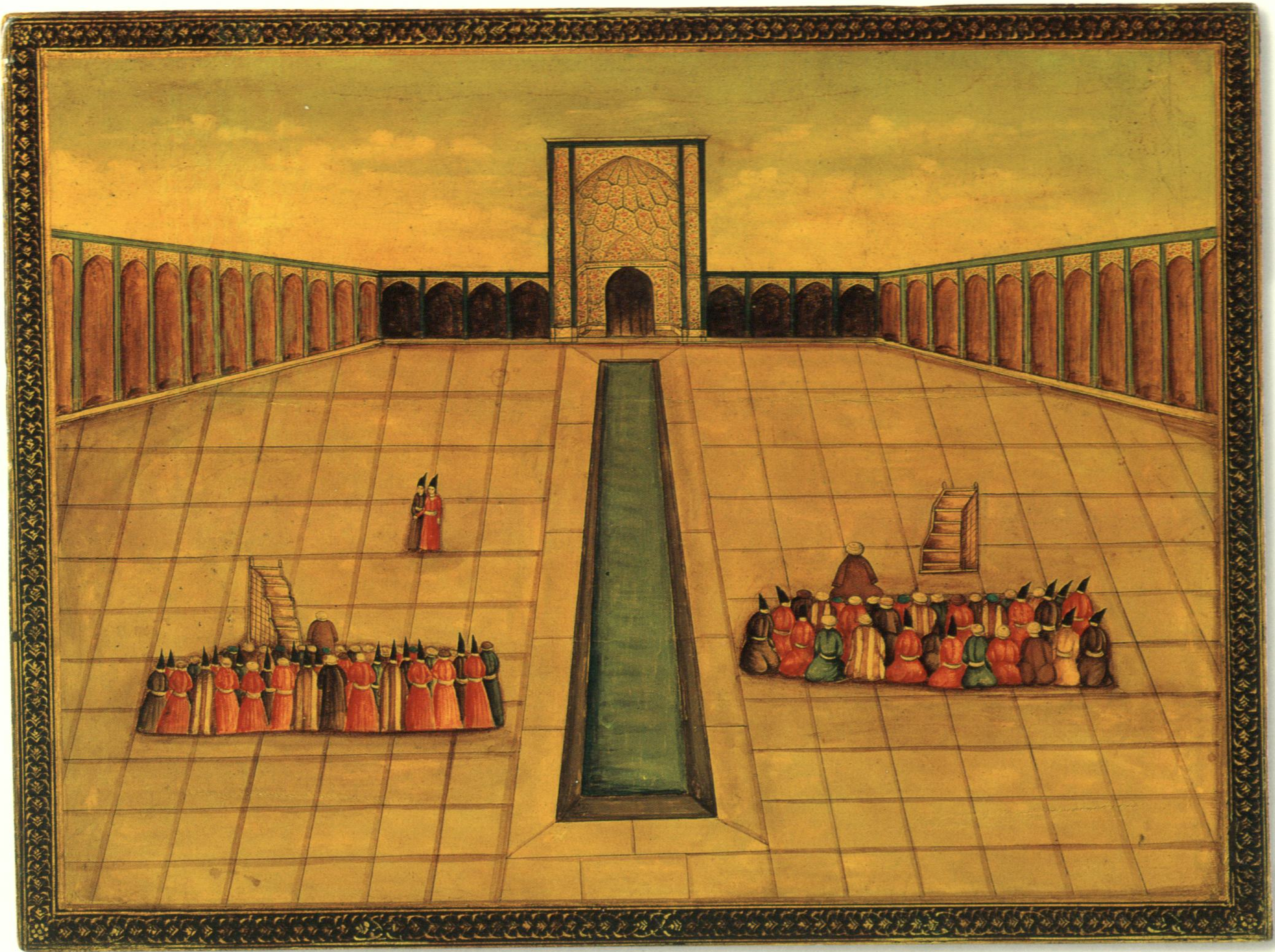
1. *Cf.* LAQ30, catalogued in Part Two.
2. LAQ28 is catalogued in Part Two.



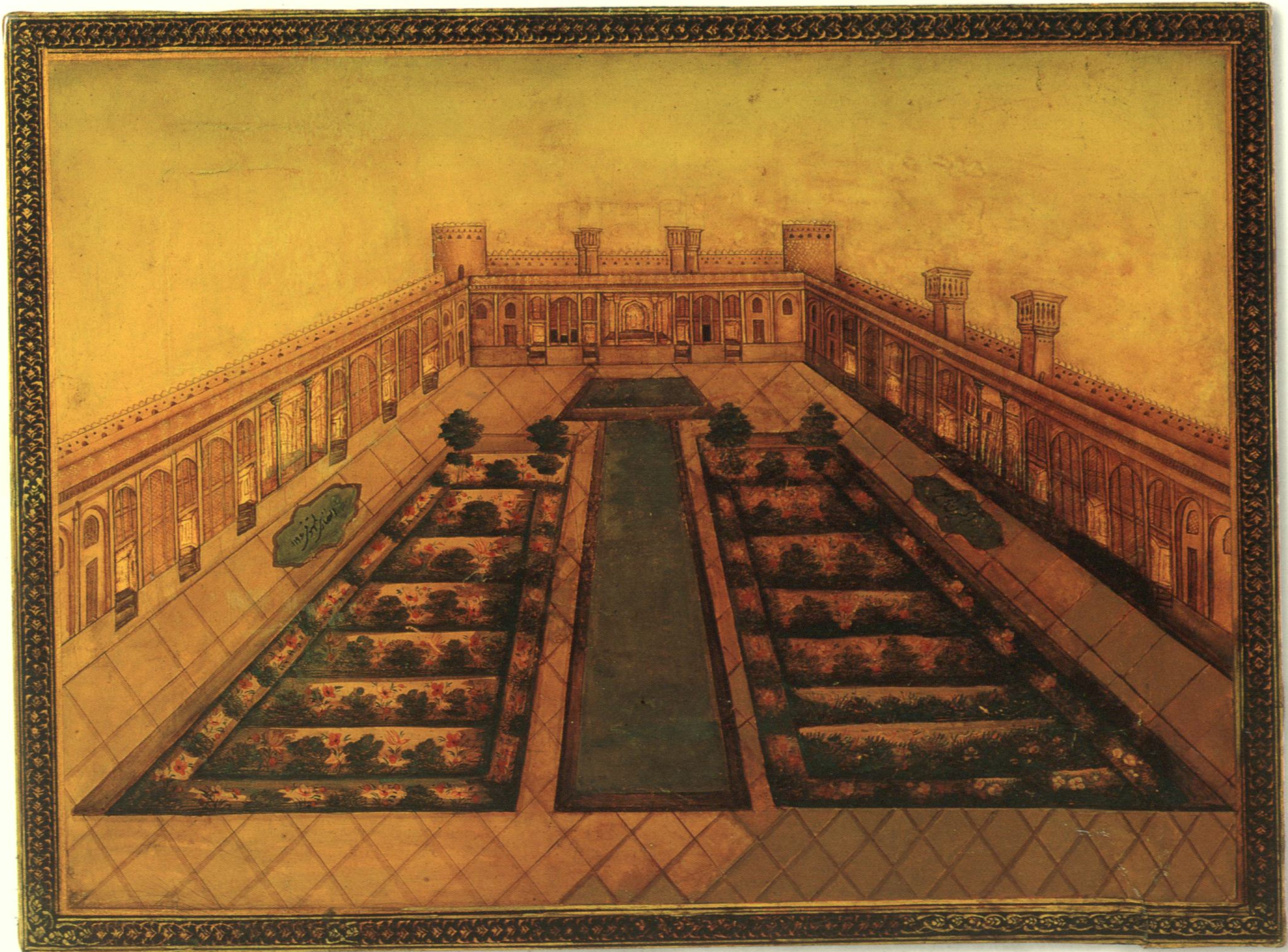
128 outer cover



128 doublure



127



127



126 top of lid



126 inside of lid

126

Box
Iran, second quarter of the 19th century

Circular papier-mâché base and fitted lid, 7.7 cm in diameter and 2.8 cm high
accession no. LAQ24

The top of the lid shows Fath 'Ali Shah and courtiers walking in a walled palace courtyard, which contains a pavilion – resembling the 'Ali Qapu in Isfahan – and water-tanks; trees and hills are visible beyond. On the inside of the lid a youth is depicted smoking a kalian while seated on a verandah that overlooks a landscape with a building. The sides are decorated with bands of gold scrollwork, on a red ground in the case of the lid, on a black ground on the base. The base of the box is covered with marbled paper on the inside, and has a cruciform design of gold scroll-work on a scarlet ground on the outside.

127

Pair of panels
Iran, AH 1196 (AD 1781–2)

Wooden boards coated with papier-mâché, each 34 × 25.5 cm; the boards are 1.1 cm thick.
The decoration on the inner face of one panel is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Abu'l-Hasan al-Ghaffari al-Mustawfi.'
accession no. LAQ350

These panels are decorated on both sides. The outer faces, which bear a flower-and-bird composition, are dated AH 1176 (AD 1762–3; see cat.66 above). The inner faces were decorated 20 years later with architectural subjects. One is a perspective view of a formal garden with a central water-tank, which is enclosed by buildings with towers and chimneys. The other is a perspective view of the courtyard of a mosque, also with a central water-tank. Two groups of men, one group seated, the other standing, have gathered before two pulpits, one on either side of the tank.

This is the only recorded example of lacquer painting by Abu'l-Hasan al-Ghaffari al-Mustawfi, who flourished in the last quarter of the 18th century.[1] Abu'l-Hasan came from a family who held a number of important administrative posts under Nadir Shah Afshar and Karim Khan Zand, and his father was governor of Kashan.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.34–7, no.58.



125 inside of lid



125 top of lid



125

125

Casket
Iran, second quarter of the 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body with four shallow feet and a fitted lid with a flat top and convex sides, 42.8 × 30 × 22.2 cm
accession no. LAQ356

The top of the lid shows a celebrated event during the course of the battle of Chaldiran in 1514: Shah Isma'il, in the centre, cleaves the Agha of the Janissaries, observed by the Ottoman Sultan, who is mounted on a white horse. The main figures are depicted amid a confused mêlée, and artillery blazes away in the background. The use of this subject in the decoration of lacquerware was no doubt inspired by the oil-painting of the battle of Chaldiran erected in the Chihil Sutun in Isfahan.[1]

The surrounding convex surfaces are set with two types of raised medallions with lobed profiles. The larger type are painted with groups of figures in a landscape, the smaller type with bust portraits of youths and girls. The areas between the medallions are filled with various flowers on a background of gold.

The interior of the lid shows Fath 'Ali Shah hunting in a landscape with trees and buildings; with a lance, he pierces a stag which is also being attacked by one of the royal hounds. On the surrounding concave surfaces are landscapes with buildings and bridges and a few small figures.

The body of the casket is painted on the outside with princes hunting, while the interior is plain. The underside of the base has large-scale floral scrollwork in gold on a red ground.

1. See Babaie 1994, for example.











top 123, 124; *bottom* 122, 123, 124



122

122

Pen box
Iran, AH 1258 (AD 1842–3)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.2 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The most humble servant, Sayyid Mirza'
accession no. LAQ269

The top of the cover carries three portraits, arranged in a vertical sequence. They are probably intended to represent three members of the ruling house of Great Britain, King George III, who had died in 1820, and two of his sons, King George IV and the Duke of York, who had died in 1830 and 1827 respectively. The sides show a European, probably English, military review. The quality of the painting matches the royal connection indicated by an inscription on the cover, 'the Sultan, son of the Sultan, Muhammad Shah Ghazi'.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have conventional floral scrolls in gold on a deep-red ground.

Sayyid Mirza is known principally as a painter in oils on a large scale. In this medium he produced an imaginary portrait of the Biblical Joseph,[1] and he has also been credited with the unsigned depiction of a dancing girl in the Victoria and Albert Museum.[2] Sayyid Mirza participated in the campaign of royal portraiture instigated by Fath 'Ali Shah, and one of his contributions, which shows the Shah enthroned with his sons and courtiers, was formerly in the Hasht Bihisht palace in Isfahan. This is dated AH 1244 (AD 1828–9), while his individual portraits of Qajar princes include two dated AH 1245 (AD 1829–30).[3]

His painting in lacquer is known principally from his collaboration with Muhammad Baqir in producing new covers for Shah Tahmasp's great copy of the *Khamsah* of Nizami, about 1825.[4] His earliest recorded work in any medium is a pen box in the Nigaristan Palace, Tehran, which is dated AH 1240 (AD 1824–5),[5] while cat.122 is his latest.

In his account of this artist Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi tried to identify Sayyid Mirza with the Sayyid Naqqash who is mentioned by Mu'ayyir al-Mamalik as 'appearing' during the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah,[6] but as Sayyid Naqqash was still alive in 1875 this identification seems unlikely.[7]

1. Robinson 1964a, fig.12; Falk 1972, no.37; Robinson 1979, fig.227. In fact, the inscription identifying this painting as *Ḥazrat-i Yūsuf* is a later addition: the figure has no halo.
2. Inv.no.P.21–1933; Robinson 1964a, pp.104–5; Falk 1972, fig.19.
3. Schulz 1914, II, pl.185.
4. British Library, OR.MS.2265; Robinson 1964b; 1991, pl.22.
5. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.233–4, no.448.
6. Mu'ayyir al-Mamalik, p.279.
7. I'timad al-Saltanah, p.6.

123

Pen box
Iran, early 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25.3 × 4.4 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ198
published Boroumand 1366, pls 33–9

This pen box, the decoration of which includes a crowded figural composition, may be attributed to Mirza Baba, although Adib Boroumand ascribed it to Sayyid Mirza. The top of the cover shows the battle of Chaldiran, with Shah Isma'il on the right, killing the Agha of the Janissaries in front of the Ottoman Sultan (compare cat.125). The sides depict a series of hunting scenes.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated with gold floral scrolls on a red ground. Those on the sliding compartment are bordered by narrow black bands filled with a series of stylized gold leaves.

124

Pen box
Iran, *circa* 1875

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.3 × 3.7 × 3.8 cm
accession no. LAQ334

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with hunting scenes in which princes participate (compare cat.123 and 129). The colour scheme is restrained, but with bright touches of gold.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are finely painted in gold with conventional floral scrollwork on a black ground.



121 outer cover



121 doublure



121 outer cover

121

Pair of book covers
Iran, *circa* 1835

Papier-mâché boards, each 16.2 × 26.2 cm, with paper mounts, 23 × 32.7 cm
accession no. LAQ20

Each cover has been split, and the two faces mounted separately in scarlet paper frames, and there has been some restoration. The paintings are unsigned, but the style of the outer faces suggests the work of Sayyid Mirza (see cat.122); the monarch's face, in particular, recalls that in the large oil painting in the Firuz collection, Tehran, which is from the Hasht Bihisht palace in Isfahan.

Both outer covers show Fath 'Ali Shah seated on the Peacock Throne. In one scene the throne stands between two pillars with spiral decoration, and the Shah is attended by princes, ministers and pages; in the other the Shah is attended by ministers and a young page, and there is an open terrace behind him.

The doublures show the Shah on horseback, engaged in hunting activities that seem more symbolic than factual. In one he is spearing a lion in the neck, and in the other his prey is a stag. In both cases the background consists of a landscape with a river, trees, and buildings.



120 top of lid



120 inside of lid


120

120

Casket
Iran, AH 1211 (AD 1796–7)

Rectangular papier-mâché body with four shallow feet and hinged lid with a flat top and convex sides, 42 × 29.2 × 19.4 cm, with silver hinges, hasp and chains.
The calligraphy on the exterior is signed, 'Written by the servant Muhammad 'Isa during the exalted and sublime sultanic reign of Aqa Muhammad Khan …'; the decoration of the interior is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Mirza Baba.'
accession no. LAQ282

The top of the lid and the sides of the casket are decorated with panels of flowers and birds on an imitation-tortoiseshell ground. The sides of the lid have massed flowers on a dark-green ground. All the panels are framed by areas of gold illumination on a red or black ground. The flat surface on the inside of the lid has a hunting scene,[1] while the surrounding concave surfaces are set with shaped medallions that appear to imitate Indian work of the type seen on the Peacock Throne, which Agha Muhammad had recently ascended; the medallions appear against a dark-green background set with gold scrolls. The inside of the body of the casket is plain black and the base has floral scrollwork in red and green on a gold ground.

There is an inscription in *naskh* around the edge of the lid; this consists of a Qur'anic quotation (LXXXVII) followed by the signature of the calligrapher, who is otherwise unknown.[2]

1. For a full description, see above, p.160.
2. On the painter Mirza Baba, see cat.91, above.

sported a magnificently large and lustrous black beard, and he appears in many portraits with his fine figure covered in jewels.

In 1821 the traveller Sir Robert Ker Porter described Fath 'Ali Shah in the most glowing terms. 'His complexion ... is exceedingly pale; but when he speaks on subjects that excite him, a vivid colour rushes to his cheek; but only for a moment, it passes so transiently away. His nose is very aquiline. His eye-brows, full, black, and finely arched; with lashes of the same appearance, shading eyes of the most perfect form, dark and beaming; but at times, full of a fire that kindles his whole countenance; though, in general, its expression is that of languor. His beard, black as jet, ample and long, and tapering to a point considerably below the hilt of his dagger. The almost sublime dignity, which this form of beard adds to the native majesty of his features, is not to be conceived; and the smile which often shone through it, ineffably sweet and noble, rather increased than diminished the effect.'[5] A further contrast between uncle and nephew concerned the matter of progeny, of which Agha Muhammad had been deprived in advance by his father's enemy. Fath 'Ali, on the other hand, applied himself with alacrity to the impregnation of any number of women, so that when he died in 1834 he was survived by no less than 5,000 descendants.[6]

One of the most striking features of the art of Fath 'Ali Shah's reign was the unprecedented number of royal portraits that were produced in a variety of media. In these portraits, which were clearly the result of a deliberate and consistent artistic policy, the king is presented as a handsome, fertile, male sovereign. This phenomenon has been attributed by B.W. Robinson to Fath 'Ali Shah's vanity,[7] but *raison d'état* may have played a more important role. For his position as king must have been somewhat undermined by the fact that he owed his throne to the efforts of an unsightly old eunuch, however determined and brave his uncle may have been; his own wholeness and beauty would therefore have been attributes he wished to emphasize. The deliberate character of this image-making is indicated by its ubiquity. The Shah's portrait was disseminated around the world in the form of large oil-paintings and splendidly illustrated manuscripts sent as diplomatic gifts, so that his noble image now graces buildings as far apart as the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi,[8] the Hermitage in St Petersburg,[9] and Windsor Castle.[10] More public, though, were its uses in Iran, for not only did Fath 'Ali Shah place his own image on the coinage, but at Taq-i Bustan and other sites he had great rock reliefs carved in the manner of the kings of ancient Iran.[11]

On a more intimate level, the subject matter of bookbinder's lacquer also provides evidence of a new trend in royal portraiture. A few celebrated examples were probably made for the Shah by artists associated with his court, including the pair of book covers prepared about 1825 for Shah Tahmasp I's great copy of the *Khamsah* of Nizami, which is now in the British Library.[12] On both outer faces the Shah is shown hunting amid a throng of princes, pages and other attendants, both mounted and on foot. The front cover, painted by Sayyid Mirza, shows Fath 'Ali Shah transfixing a lion and its prey, a wild ass, with a single thrust of his weapon, in the manner of Bahram Gur.[13] In the very similar composition on the back cover, which was executed by Muhammad Baqir, the monarch has speared a lion that has a deer in its mouth.[14] Despite the throng around him, the attention of the viewer is drawn to the Shah. This is particularly true of Sayyid Mirza's version, where Fath 'Ali is shown proceeding stage right at a fair gallop, while the other figures are taking their time; the monarch's speed is partly suggested by the curve to the left in the end of his beard. The emphasis on the Shah seems greater than in hunting scenes in the Zand tradition, such as that on cat.120,[15] and on cat.121, which bears images of Fath 'Ali Shah apparently derived from the *Khamsah* binding, this tendency has been taken to its natural conclusion, and the retainers and princes have been eliminated.[16]

Fath 'Ali Shah was in a difficult position when he succeeded his uncle. His own achievements in the field were limited, and the main actor in the events that had assured the Qajar dynasty of their dominance had been his uncle, whose status as a beardless eunuch he did not wish to emphasize. His enthusiasm for battle scenes and the like would therefore have been limited, and in their place he promoted royal themes of a generic nature, in which he was shown engaged in the formal and endlessly repeatable rituals of kingship. Oil-paintings of the Shah enthroned in splendour were one result, and lacquer bindings showing him as a royal huntsman, with or without his companions and retainers, were another. In all these he is portrayed sporting a luxuriant beard: in both life and art Fath 'Ali Shah's beard was one part of a conscious programme designed to present the Shah as a man fit to wield absolute power in Iran.

1. Perry 1985; Hambly 1991.
2. Malcolm 1815, II, p.311.
3. Robinson 1979, p.333; 1986, n.12 (on p.45).
4. Malcolm 1815, II, pp.300–1.
5. Quoted in Robinson 1964a, p.95; Falk 1972, p.23.
6. Robinson 1964a, p.95.
7. Robinson 1964a, p.96; 1979, p.334; 1986, p.5.
8. Robinson 1964a, pp.98–9; 1964b, p.32.
9. Robinson 1964a, fig.6; Adamova 1971; Falk 1972, figs 13, 14.
10. Robinson 1965, fig.5.
11. Robinson 1964a, p.96.
12. Or.MS.2265; Robinson 1964b.
13. See also Robinson 1965, pl.98; 1991, pl.22.
14. See also Diba 1989a, pl.7; Robinson 1991, pl.23. These two scenes appear to be miniaturized versions of monumental oil-paintings showing the Shah hunting. His portrait in New Delhi is a rare surviving example (see note 8 above).
15. *Cf.* also Robinson 1965, pl.95; Diba 1989a, pl.6 (reversed in error), a mirror case in the Victoria & Albert Museum (inv. no.763–1888) which shows Karim Khan Zand hunting with companions.
16. *Cf.* also cat.125, and Robinson 1986, no.12.



Fig.5
Enamel portrait of Fath 'Ali Shah, Iran, early 19th century. Khalili Collection, JLY1231

Below
121 detail of doublure

The final collapse of Safavid power in Iran in the third decade of the 18th century led to a disturbed period in which a series of warlords fought to gain the upper hand. Among the main players were the leaders of the Qajars, a Turkish tribal grouping living mainly in the province of Astarabad, south-east of the Caspian Sea. Muhammad Hasan Khan Qajar was the principal authority in the Caspian coastlands after the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, and he used this region as his base in an attempt to bring the whole of Iran under his sway. His defeat and death in 1759 marked the beginning of two decades of relative calm in Iran, under Muhammad Karim Khan Zand of Shiraz. But after Karim Khan died in 1779 Muhammad Hasan Khan's son, Agha Muhammad Khan, was able to achieve the dominance in Iranian affairs that had eluded his father.

The growing importance of Agha Muhammad was marked by the removal of the capital from Astarabad to the more central city of Tehran in 1786, and in the course of the next decade he eliminated his remaining rivals, assuming the title of shah in the spring of 1796. But he, too, was assassinated in 1797, and the unified realm passed to his nephew Fath 'Ali Shah.[1] With the accession of the new ruler, the scene was set for a revival in royal patronage of the arts on a scale not seen since the heyday of the Safavid dynasty. In this revival portraits of the Shah himself played a much greater role than in any period since the Islamic conquest of Iran, 1,200 years before.

Agha Muhammad was noted for his frugal ways. Sir John Malcolm, who first visited Iran three years after the Shah's assassination, remarked on his 'contempt of luxury' and recorded that 'he was always dressed in the plainest manner' unless on occasions of ceremony.[2] Instances of his patronage are consequently rare. But Agha Muhammad's dislike of unnecessary display could not prevent his subjects from presenting him with valuable items in the hope of some return. A fine casket in the Khalili Collection, cat.120, was made towards the end of the Shah's life and may have been intended as a gift of this kind. In any case, it is a rare example of an object that bears his name. The decoration of the exterior consists mostly of flower-and-bird compositions of some quality, framed by areas of illumination on a red ground, but around the edge of the lid there is a long inscription in gold *naskh* on the same red ground. This contains the whole of surah LXXXVII (*al-A'lā*, 'the Sublime') from the Qur'an, ending with the signature of the calligrapher Muhammad 'Isa, who 'wrote it during the exalted and sublime sultanic reign of Agha Muhammad Khan', in AH 1211 (AD 1796–7).

The decoration on the inside of the lid can also be connected with Agha Muhammad. It is dated to the same year, AH 1211, and was signed by Mirza Baba, who seems to have worked for Qajar patrons as early as AH 1203 (AD 1788–9), when he was living in their home town of Astarabad.[3] The flat central panel shows a boar hunt in a rather vapid style, and the casket's connection with the dynasty is marked by the specifically Qajar headgear worn by all but one of the huntsmen. The one figure who does not wear this type of hat is the horseman who has transfixed the boar with his lance. He wears a turban that may well have been 'sultanic', which suggests that this figure was intended as a portrait, albeit idealized, of the Shah. That the figure is also beardless strengthens this assumption for, in 1748, at the age of seven, Agha Muhammad Khan had been emasculated by Nadir Shah's nephew 'Adil Shah, in an act of vengeance on the child's father.

This act of cruelty has traditionally been seen as the origin of the Shah's own lack of humanity: in 1794, for example, he had thousands of the male inhabitants of Kirman massacred or blinded and enslaved their wives and children, because they had allowed his enemy Lutf 'Ali Khan Zand to escape him. But the castration Agha Muhammad had suffered also had an effect on his appearance. According to Sir John Malcolm, his 'beardless and shrivelled face resembled that of an aged and wrinkled woman; and the expression of his countenance, at no times pleasant, was horrible when clouded, as it often was, by indignation. He was sensible of this, and could not bear that anyone should look at him.'[4] By contrast his successor had the highest opinion of his own appearance, for, whereas Agha Muhammad was beardless, his nephew Fath 'Ali





119 front of case with shutter



119 back of case



118 outer face



118 inner face



117 lower cover

116

Prayer card in the form of a mirror case with shutter
Isfahan, AH 1151 (AD 1738–9)

Papier-mâché case, 17.7 × 11.7 cm, and hinged shutter, 15.3 × 9.3 cm, with gold hinges and clasp.
The inscriptions are signed, 'Written by the dust on the soles of the believers, Ahmad al-Nayrizi – May God grant him and his parents pardon!'
accession no. LAQ277

This curious object is in the form of a rectangular mirror case with a hinged shutter. All its surfaces are covered with calligraphy in various tones of gold, in the *naskh* and *riqā'* scripts, on a black ground. The text is arranged in horizontal lines divided by gold fillets, except on the back of the case, where it fills a lobed central medallion and pendants, and the surrounding frame. All the surfaces have borders of a repeating floral pattern in gold on black.

Three of the surfaces, the outer and inner faces of the shutter and the space where the mirror would normally have been placed, are inscribed with a series of prayers, with the Persian titles written in *riqā'* and the main Arabic texts written in *naskh*. The first of the texts on the outer face of the shutter is entitled, 'The prayer said on shaving one's head', and reads, 'In the name of God, and by God, and by the religious community of the Messenger of God and his Sunnah, I am a true Muslim believer, and not a polytheist. O God! Grant me a radiant light for every one of my hairs on the Day of Judgment!' The remaining eight prayers are similar in tone. They are, on the outer face of the shutter, those said 'on putting one's turban on one's head' and 'on eating food'; and, on the inside of the shutter, those said 'on putting on new clothes', 'on putting on a finger-ring', and 'on cutting one's nails or one's moustache'; while the prayers written where the mirror ought to have been are, very appropriately, those said 'on looking at a mirror', 'on applying kohl' and 'on brushing one's beard'. The last word of this prayer, *al-shayṭān* ('Satan'), was written in the middle of the last line and is flanked by the signature of Ahmad al-Nayrizi (see cat.115), which continues on the last line on the inner face of the shutter.
The inscriptions on the back of the case are in gold *riqā'* on a sparkling chocolate-brown ground. That in the central medallion and pendants is another prayer, 'said repeatedly to ward off plague and pestilence': 'For me there are five things with which to extinguish the all-consuming heat of Hell, namely, the Chosen One, the Approved Successor, their two sons and al-Fatimah.' The text in the surrounding frame is a prayer for the Prophet, his family and the Twelve Imams, 'O God! Bless the Chosen One, Muhammad, and the Approved Successor, 'Ali, and the Virgin, Fatimah, and their two sons, the Gallant Imams al-Hasan and al-Husayn! Bless the Ornament of Worshippers, 'Ali, and the Perceptive One, Muhammad, and the Truthful One, Ja'far, and the Forebearing One, Musa, and the Accepted One, 'Ali, and the God-fearing One, Muhammad, and the Distinguished One, 'Ali, and the Blameless One, the One Impounded, al-Hasan! Bless the Proof That Will Arise, the Expected Successor! God's blessings be upon them all!'

117

Pair of book covers
Isfahan, AH 1144 (AD 1731–2)

Papier-mâché boards, each 29.5 × 19.5 cm.
The inscriptions are signed, 'Written by the servant who prays for the ever-lasting rule of the all-conquering state, Ahmad al-Nayrizi.'
accession no. LAQ487

The outer covers have a central field of a plain, rich black, which is surrounded by a border formed by panels with Arabic inscriptions in red *riqā'*, separated by conventional floral designs in gold. The doublures are red.

As on cat.115, the texts on the two covers contain a number of *ḥadīths* relating to the Qur'an and to prayer, which suggests that the covers were made for a copy of the Qur'an or a devotional manuscript. There are three sayings of the Prophet on what was probably the upper cover. The first, partially obscured by a repair, mentions that a man complained to the Prophet about congestion in his chest; so the Prophet said: 'Seek a cure in the Qur'an, for God says of His Noble Book, "and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts" (x, verse 57). Another reads, 'There is a way of adorning everything, and the means of adornment for the Qur'an is a beautiful voice.'

On the lower cover there are two *ḥadīths*. Firstly, 'The Prophet said, "Truly, shall I show you a weapon that will save you from your enemies and make your means of sustenance abundant?" They said, "Yes, indeed." He said, "Pray to your Lord night and day, for the believer's weapon is prayer" ' (compare cat.115). Secondly, 'Nothing will deflect the divine decree except prayer.' This last is followed by the signature of the calligrapher and the date.

118

Shutter from a mirror case
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché board, 18.8 × 12.2 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by Nazar 'Ali Beg.'
accession no. LAQ478

The outer face of the shutter has a sparkling crimson ground, with a central lobed medallion, pendants and a frame, all of which have inscriptions in gold *naskh* on a black ground. The inscriptions consist of three prayers, similar in nature to those found on cat.116, above. The longest is a Shi'i prayer in Arabic set in cartouches within the outer frame. Those in the medallion and pendants are short prayers in Arabic, but with Persian titles. One is a prayer 'on looking at a mirror' while the other is 'on applying kohl'.

The inner face has a floral border and shows Yusuf entering the apartment of Zulaykha, who is seated on a jewelled throne. Yusuf, who has a halo and wears a round gold turban, carries a jewelled gold ewer and basin. The group of three maidservants in the foreground demonstrate their consternation at Yusuf's beauty to the extent that one has fainted. A similar, though more complex, rendition of this scene appears on cat.71, above.

Nothing is known of the painter Nazar 'Ali Beg.[1]

1. See Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1092–3.

119

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, *circa* 1840

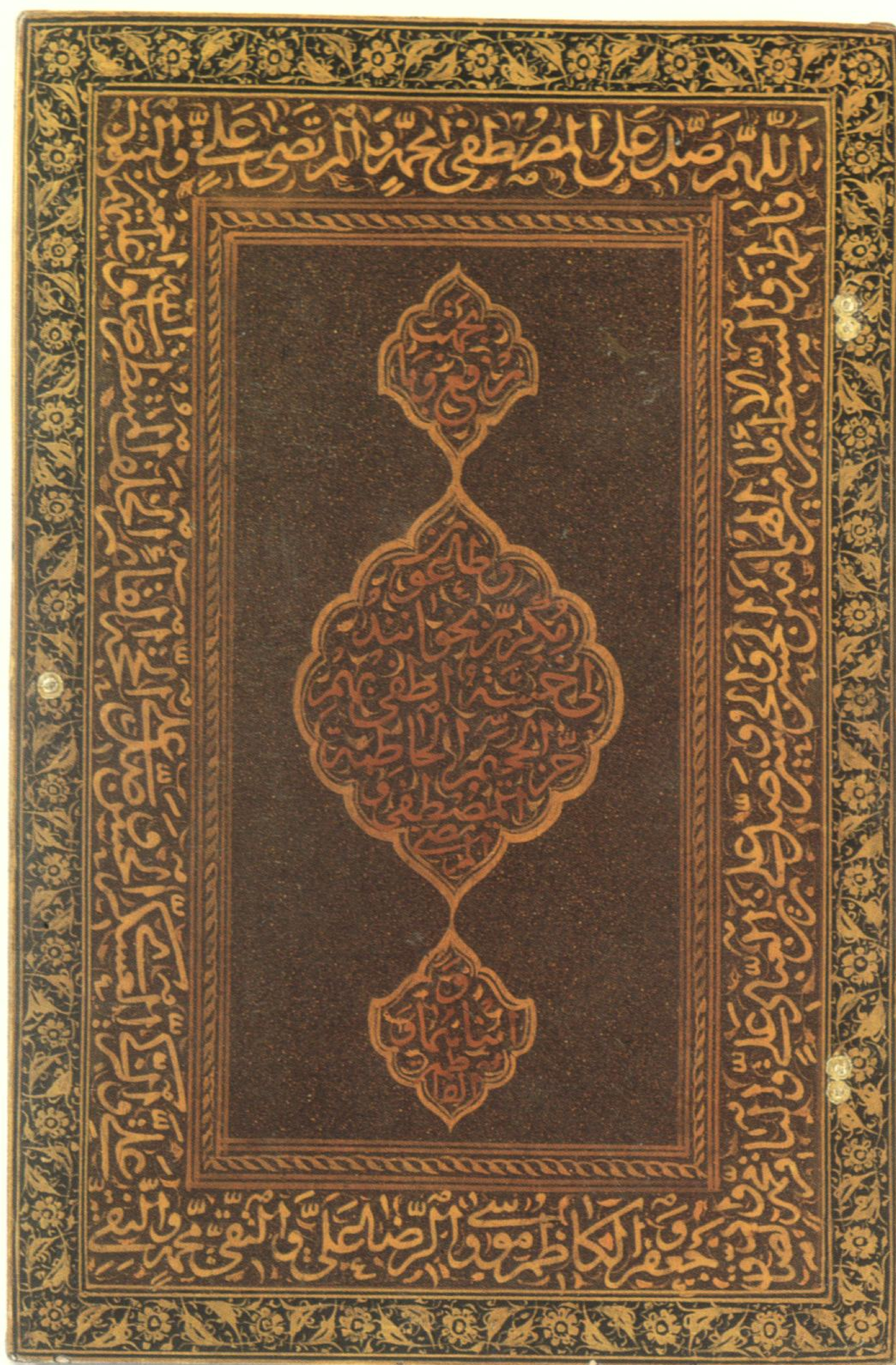
Rectangular papier-mâché case, 40.5 × 27.7 cm, and fitted shutter, 37.5 × 24.7 cm
accession no. LAQ152

The outside of the shutter and the back of the case are painted with very similar compositions, which show the same prince and princess seated on chairs on a terrace while dancing girls entertain them. In the first scene it is night, and food is being served to the pair at a table, while the second scene takes place during the day. The inside of the shutter shows Yusuf and Zulaykha seated on chairs on a terrace. He is haloed, and she wears a crown at a rakish angle. All three scenes are framed by verses in *nasta'līq*.

As on cat.136 below, these verses were chosen for their relevance to the imagery they surround. Those on the inside of the shutter, for example, are from the passage in the *Yusuf and Zulaykha* of Jami where Yusuf is summoned to the palace built by Zulaykha in order to seduce him. Zulaykha, as beautiful as a Buddhist statue ('the idol of China'), enters. 'She placed her resplendent crown of scintillating rubies and the purest gold on her mound of musk-black hair. She sent someone in search of Yusuf; she sent her servants here and there. Suddenly he entered through the door, as beautiful as the Moon, as awe-inspiring as Mercury, as magnificent as the Sun. When Zulaykha's eyes fell upon him, it was as though a torch had fallen into a reed bed, such was her desire.'[1]

The verses on the outer face of the shutter and the back of the case are more generic, as are the accompanying scenes of love. In both cases the first five hemistichs are the same, 'O idol, I am so in love with you that I doubt my own existence! However weak and feeble I may be, if it came to pass that I had a thousand souls, I would scatter them at your blessed feet!'

1. Jami, pp.131–2.



116 back of case



116 front of case with shutter



116 interior



Isfahan *circa* AH 1100 (AD 1688–9), where his patrons included Shah Sultan Husayn and members of the Safavid court; indeed, in some works produced in this shah's reign he used the title al-Sultani. His recorded pieces are dated between 1682 and 1739. Ahmad al-Nayrizi is famous as a copyist of Qur'ans and religious works, but he seems to have specialized too in the decoration of lacquer wares with inscriptions for, in addition to the three examples in the Khalili Collection (see also cat.116 and cat.117), he produced a rectangular pen box with a lift-off lid, dated AH 1144 (AD 1731–2),[2] and a binding dated AH 1146 (AD 1733–4).[3]

1. Bayani 1345–58, IV, pp.19–31, no.64; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.61, no.108. For a more detailed treatment of Nayrizi and his work in the Khalili Collection, see Safwat 1996, pp.212–13.
2. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pls 113, 1155.
3. Sarre 1923, pl.XXIV.

115

Pair of book covers
Isfahan, AH 1144 (AD 1731–2)

Papier-mâché boards, each 19.5 × 11.8 cm, with faded red leather spine and doublures.
The inscriptions are signed, 'Written by the servant Ahmad al-Nayrizi.'
accession no. LAQ470

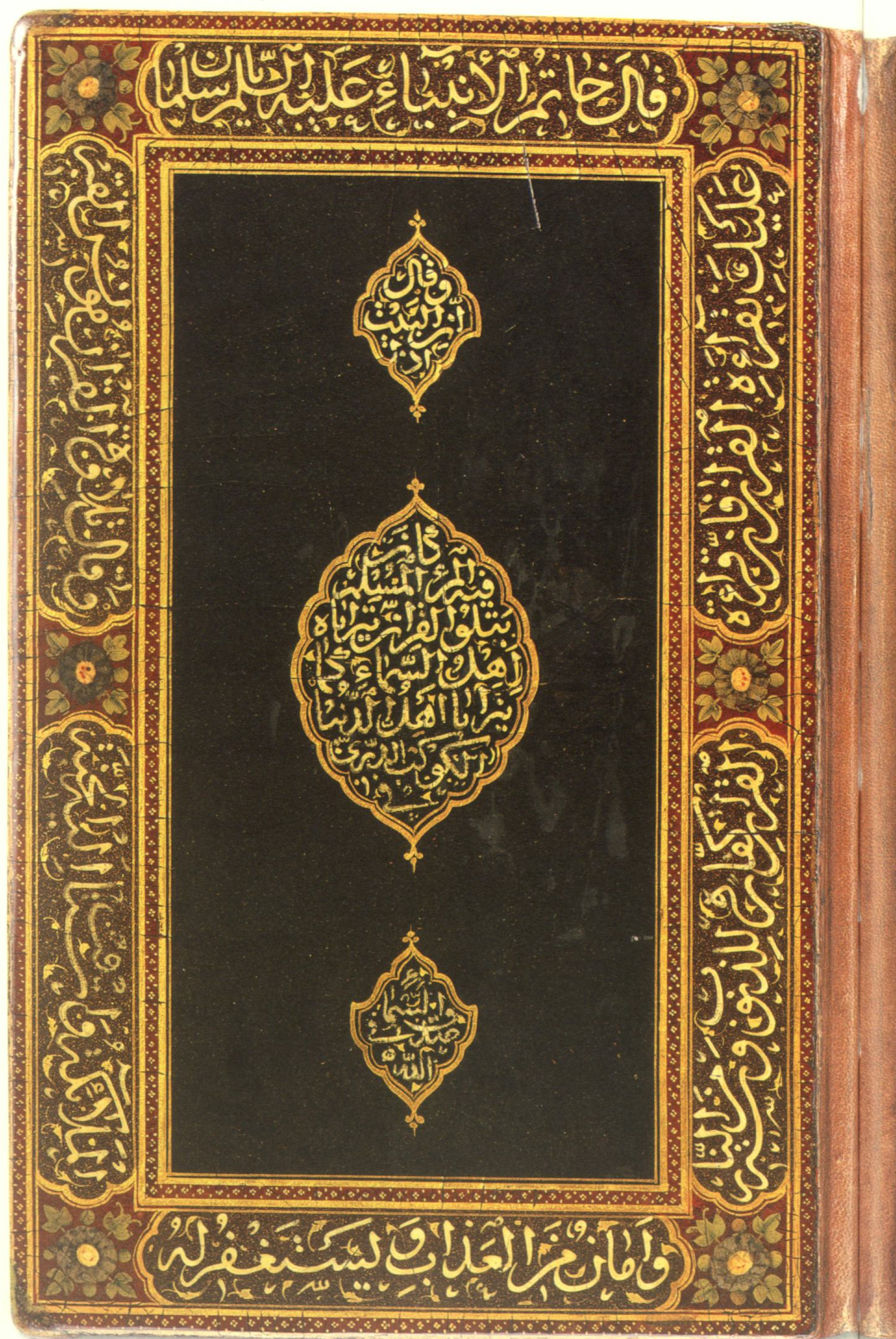
This is one of two sets of book covers in the Khalili Collection that were decorated with inscriptions by Ahmad al-Nayrizi in the year 1144; the other set is cat. 117 below. The nature of the inscription's on both sets – sayings of the Prophet Muhammad relating to the reading of the Qur'an and to prayer – indicates that they were used as bindings for copies of the Qur'an or devotional manuscripts.

In this example the main fields of the outer covers are a rich, slightly sparkling black. The lobed medallions and pendants in the centre of the fields are filled with inscriptions in white *riqā'*, as are the cartouches within the frame, which are separated by blue flowers.

The cartouches in the frame on the upper cover contain two sayings of the Prophet: 'O Salman! It is your duty to recite the Qur'an, for recitation of the Qur'an makes atonement for sins and offers protection against the fires of Hell and remission from suffering. The angels will beg forgiveness for one who recites the Qur'an, and … paradise will be his due'; and, 'Recitation of the Qur'an will be a companion in the grave.' Other *ḥadīths* fill the central medallion and pendants.

The first of the *ḥadīths* in the border of the lower cover reappears in this position on cat. 117. It is, 'Truly, shall I show you a weapon that will save you from your enemies and make your means of sustenance abundant? They said, "Yes, indeed." He said, "Pray to your Lord night and day, for the believer's weapon is prayer."' The second is, 'Prayer is a shield for the believer.' The third and fourth, which occur in the central medallion and pendants, are, 'Prayer is more effective than an iron spearhead', and 'Prayers said between the call of the muezzin and the commencement of worship will not be rejected.' This last is followed by the calligrapher's signature and the date.

Ahmad ibn Shams al-Din Muhammad al-Nayrizi is considered one of the greatest masters of *naskh* that Iran has produced.[1] He settled in



115 outer covers



114 upper cover



113 front of case with shutter

113

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, late 19th or early 20th century

Papier-mâché case, 22.4 × 15.3 cm, and hinged shutter, 19.5 × 12.5 cm, with brass hinges and hasp.
The decoration is signed, 'Illuminated by Muhammad Baqir al-Musawi, entitled Sani' al-Zaman.'
accession no. LAQ65

The back of the case and the outer face of the shutter are decorated with a design of large composite blossoms, exquisitely painted in two tones of gold on a dark-green ground; there is a border of running gold scrollwork on a yellow ground. The inner face of the shutter is crimson and has a central medallion and corner-pieces of floral scrollwork, executed in gold and picked out with colours.

The main design on the exterior of this mirror case is strikingly similar to that on the binding of a copy of a work by Jami made in Herat in 1494.[1] If the binding is contemporary with the manuscript, which seems more than likely, then this mirror case may be seen as a 'revivalist' piece.

Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi has an entry on Muhammad Baqir al-Musawi Sani' al-Zaman, which is based on this mirror case.[2] A pen box in the Khalili Collection, LAQ452 (see Part Two), is also signed by this artist and is dated to the AH 1320s (between AD 1902 and 1911).

1. Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1 July 1991, lot no. 291.
2. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p. 669, no. 955.

114

Binding of a *Dīvān* of Hafiz
Iran, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 24 × 15.3 cm
accession no. MSS382

This binding is attached to a copy of the *Dīvān* of Hafiz in *shikastah* script made by Muhammad 'Ali Shirazi.

The outer covers have a central medallion with pendants, corner-pieces and a triple border, all executed in gold on a black ground. Each element of the design is filled with different types of scrollwork – a vine scroll for the centre-and-corner composition, for example, and stylized lotus scrolls for the main field.

The doublures are black and display a single narcissus plant. The border is brick-red, with gold scrollwork.

110

Pen box
Iran, late 18th or early 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body and slightly convex, lift-off lid with a shaped 'lock' at the front, 24.9 × 5.1 × 4.3 cm
accession no. LAQ449

The top of the lid and the sides of the body are decorated with a pattern of bold floral scrolls that includes long, feathery leaves. The design is executed in gold and touches of colour on a green ground. The inside of the lid is black, with large floral scrolls in gold. The red base is undecorated, except for simple gold rules.

The decoration of this pen box has many similarities with an illuminated document in the Khalili Collection dated AH 1223 (AD 1808–9), especially the section that includes the signature of the illuminator, Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayni al-Musawi al-Isfahani.[1] Furthermore, the gold-work on the inside of the lid is similar to that in the borders of cat.112, which was signed 'The work of Abu'l-Qasim'. The decoration of this pen box may therefore be tentatively attributed to Abu'l-Qasim.

1. MSS758; see Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.47–8, no.72; Vernoit, forthcoming.

111

Pen box
Iran, early 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché body and slightly convex, hinged lid, 26.2 × 5.8 × 4.7 cm; gold hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ200

The exterior has a yellow ground, which is covered with feathery scrollwork similar to that on cat.110. In this case only the outline of the main design has been executed. This makes it rather difficult to read, but some indication of relief is conveyed by the gold applied to the tiny leaves that form a background theme. The edge of the lid is dark-red, with a running pattern of floral scrollwork in gold. The design on the inside of the lid is similar to that on the outside, but in gold on a red ground. The inside of the box is pale green.

112

Casket
Iran, AH 1238 (AD 1822–3)

Rectangular wooden body and flat lid, 31 × 19.3 × 8.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The work of Abu'l-Qasim'
accession no. LAQ64

The top of the casket is black, and the main field has gold scrollwork set with conventional floral motifs. Bands of similar scrolling elements, also in gold on a black ground, form the border to the main design and decorate the sides of the lid and the sides of the body. Each of these bands is defined by crimson and gold edging. The base and the interior are a plain reddish-brown, although there are traces of a medallion-and-pendants composition on the base.

Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi recorded two works by an illuminator called Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayni al-Musawi al-Isfahani: a book cover dated AH 1222 (AD 1807–8), and an illuminated document in the Khalili Collection (MSS758) dated AH 1223 (AD 1808–9).[1] He identified this artist with the calligrapher Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayni, known as Mirza Kuchak, although Mehdi Bayani recorded an inscription by the calligrapher's son stating that Mirza Kuchak had died in AH 1220 (AD 1805–6).[2] Karimzadeh Tabrizi also listed an illuminator called Abu'l-Qasim Muzahhib-bashi, who was mentioned in an inscription by Razi Sani' Humayun. Karimzadeh called him 'Shirazi' but presented no evidence for connecting him with Shiraz.[3]

On the basis of cat.110, which forms a link between this piece and the illuminated document of 1808–9 mentioned above, it seems likely that the Abu'l-Qasim who decorated this casket was the illuminator Abu'l-Qasim al-Husayni al-Musawi al-Isfahani.[4]

1. See cat.110, note 1.
2. Bayani 1345–58, IV, pp.8–9, no.27.
3. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.48, no.73.
4. The superb illumination on an undated Qur'an in the Khalili Collection (QUR115) was also signed by Abu'l-Qasim, as was that on a Qur'an in the Gulistan Library, Tehran (Bayani 1345–58, IV, p.232, no.17).



112







top of lid, side, inside of lid



111





109

109

Large pen box
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché body and slightly convex, lift-off lid with rounded ends, lined with leather, 34.6 × 7.5 × 7.2 cm
accession no. LAQ148

The top of the lid and the sides of the body of this large pen box are decorated with gold flower-and-bird designs on a black ground. A very similar design appears on the red base. The interior of the lid, which is also red, is painted with an overall floral pattern, now worn.





108

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1148 (AD 1735–6)

Rectangular papier-mâché body and slightly convex, lift-off lid with a shaped 'lock' at the front, 27.1 × 5.9 × 5.4 cm; lined with red and green leather.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the servant Muhammad Hadi.'
accession no. LAQ149

This pen box is the work of the celebrated 18th-century illuminator Muhammad Hadi,[1] and it can be compared with a similar pen box decorated by the same artist in the same year.[2]

The top of the lid and the sides of the body are covered with conventional floral scrolls, finely painted in gold on black; the sides of the lid are decorated with a comparable pattern on red. The base of the box is red and has similar gold floral designs, arranged as two individual sprays flanking the cartouche bearing the signature and the date.

1. See pp.144, above.
2. Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p.111 and fig.30.



112 top of lid

example, was painted by an illuminator called Abu'l-Qasim in AH 1238 (AD 1822–3), and its design appears to be the result of deliberate revivalism, for it can be compared with the gold-on-black lacquer binding on a manuscript completed in Sha'ban 899 (May–June 1494).[11] Cat.109, on the other hand, illustrates a degree of continuity. Probably made in the late 18th century, it is decorated with flower-and-bird compositions of a standard type, but modelled in gold on a dark ground. A similar type of ornament can be seen on the margins of some pages in the St Petersburg album, including one, on folio 53b, that was signed by Muhammad Hadi in 1747,[12] and it was later taken up by masters such as Mahmud Muzahhib-bashi and Razi Sani' Humayun, who both flourished towards the end of the 19th century, and who sometimes added colour to the designs (see Part Two).

1. See James 1992a, 1992b, for example.
2. The contrast between areas with black and red grounds was probably inspired by the Chinese prototypes of Islamic lacquer, which had black exteriors and red interiors; see pp.12–14 above.
3. Ivanov 1970; Adle 1980, pp.29–33, 37–42. Adle identified Hajji Muhammad with Muhammad Ibrahim; see above, pp.54, 56 and 57, note 22.
4. Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p.111, and fig.3.
5. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1098–100, no.1167. Karimzadeh identified Muhammad Hadi the illuminator with Shaykh Ramzi (see Nasrabadi, p.373). But as the shaykh composed a chronogram dated AH 1068 (AD 1657–8; Nasrabadi, pp.484–5) there can be no connection with the illuminator, who flourished after 1735.
6. See p.73 above.
7. For this and other wordings, see Ivanov, Grek & Akimushkin 1962, pp.9–10; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1098–1100, no.1167; Boroumand 1366, p.103.
8. Except, that is, the three that were left unilluminated.
9. Ivanov, Grek & Akimushkin 1962, pp.14–15.
10. It is possible, though, that Muhammad Hadi the illuminator was the same person as Muhammad Hadi the flower-painter, whom Claudius James Rich met in Shiraz in 1821, in view of the flower-painter's great age at the time; see cat.138.
11. See p.21, note 55 above.
12. Akimushkin 1994, p.61.

Designs in gold. A pen box by Muhammad Hadi

107

Binding of a Qur'an
Iran, 18th or 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 6.1 × 4.1 cm
accession no. QUR184

This tiny lacquer binding is attached to a copy of the Qur'an signed by Muhammad Riza ibn Muhammad Hashim ibn Shams al-Din al-Khwansari in AH 1107 (AD 1695–6). However, the binding must be of a later date, as the text block has been cut down severely to fit it.

The outer covers are black and are covered with conventional scrollwork in gold. The doublures have a single hyacinth plant on a gold ground, surrounded by a black frame with a repeat pattern of tiny flowers.



107 doublure

In the Islamic tradition of book production, decorative illumination enjoyed an unusual degree of prestige, no doubt because of its use on fine copies of the Qur'an, and at several points in history it attained a splendour that has rarely been matched.[1] The art of the decorative illuminator was also central to the development of bookbinder's lacquer, for the first examples of this art form, produced in Herat in the last quarter of the 15th century, were decorated with illuminated designs executed in gold on a black ground, in imitation of Chinese *qiangjin* lacquer (see cat. 1, for example). The tradition created at this time flourished during succeeding centuries, either in the form of the bands of gold-work that framed figurative images, or as overall ornament.

On the exterior of cat. 26, for example, a repeat pattern of tiny flowers, executed in gold on black, frames the image on the lid of the box; gold scrollwork on a black ground divides the eight fields on the sides; and a fine rendering of a fruiting vine appears in gold on red on the base of the box.[2] Cat. 26 was produced in 1712 or 1713 by Hajji Muhammad, and another pen box by the same artist, dated 1673, shows that he also employed overall decoration of conventional gold scrollwork, as did his brother Muhammad Ibrahim.[3] The same



107 outer covers

type of feathery and spiky scrolls appear in the illuminated designs of Muhammad Hadi, who decorated cat. 108 and another, very similar pen box in AH 1148 (AD 1735–6),[4] as well as a lacquer mirror case dated Isfahan, AH 1150 (AD 1737–8).[5]

In the following year, AH 1151 (AD 1738–9), Muhammad Hadi placed his signature on the binding of the St Petersburg album E–14. The binding was also signed by 'Ali Ashraf, who appears to have been Muhammad Hadi's teacher, for the wording of one of the signatures Muhammad Hadi employed – *Hādī az luṭf-i 'Alī ashraf shud* ('Hadi became most noble by the grace of 'Ali') – resembles that used as a signature by 'Ali Ashraf,[6] and it too can be interpreted both as a pious reference to the tenth imam, 'Ali al-Hadi, and as a declaration that 'Hadi became [a painter] by the grace of 'Ali Ashraf'.[7] Muhammad Hadi also worked with two other students of 'Ali Ashraf, Muhammad Sadiq and Muhammad Baqir, on the illuminated settings of the St Petersburg album. In fact, his contribution was the most substantial, as he executed the borders of all the pages set with examples of the calligraphy of 'Imad al-Hasani.[8] No less than 82 of these are signed and dated, showing that his work on the album was effected in two phases: a few were executed between 1747 and 1749, and the great majority between 1755 and 1759.[9]

No lacquer wares decorated by Muhammad Hadi later than 1739 have been recorded,[10] but illuminated designs continued to be employed by other artists. Cat. 112 below, for



106 front of case with shutter

106

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, early 19th century

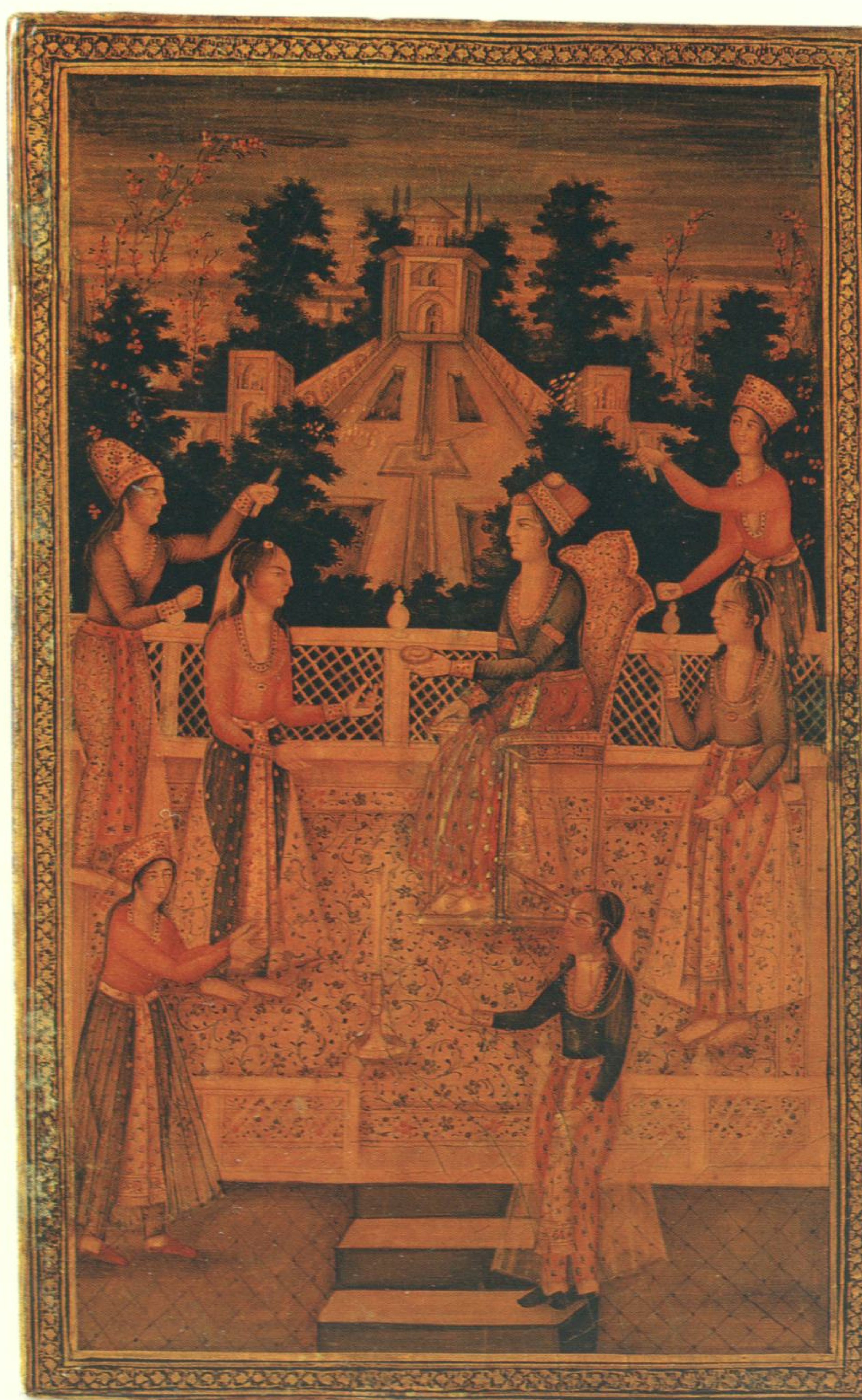
Rectangular papier-mâché case, 21.5 × 14.2 cm, and hinged shutter, 19 × 11.8 cm; silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ18

The outer face of the shutter shows Indian youths receiving instruction by night. The various implements scattered among the group include a globe on a stand (compare with cat.104) and a lacquer pen box, with the sliding compartment open to reveal a small inkpot. The scene is set in the courtyard of a building, and a shepherd with his flock passes through the wooded landscape in the background. On the inner face an Indian princess is shown seated on a terrace in the company of six ladies, two of whom are letting off fireworks. Beyond can be seen the terrace pavilions, set in a formal garden.

On the back of the case an old man and two youths are shown kneeling before a high priest, who is seated on a dais with steps and has two female attendants. Behind this scene a herdsman and his pigs cross a bridge towards a group of buildings, against a wooded background, and there are cherubs amid the clouds in the sky.

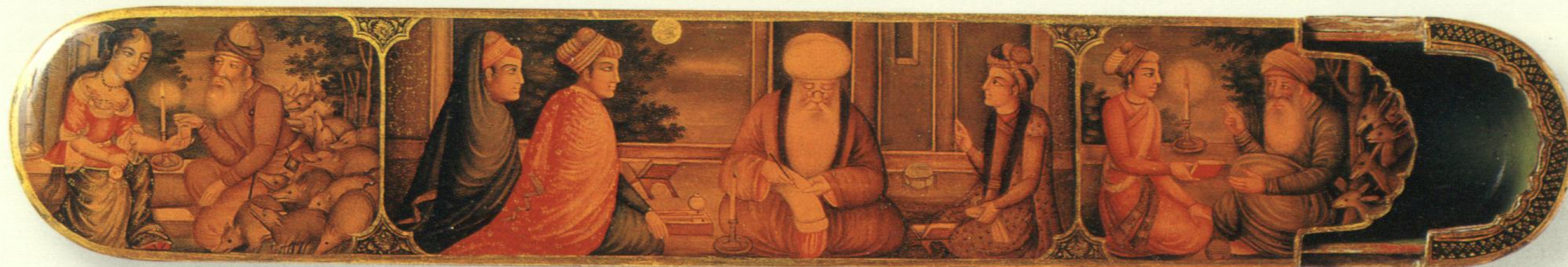


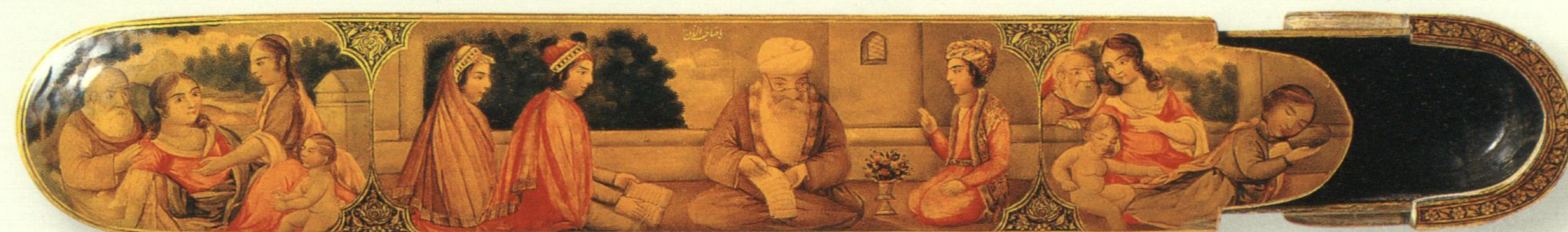
106 back of case



106 inner face of shutter













103, 104, 105

103

Pen box
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25.2 × 4.7 × 4.1 cm
accession no. LAQ318

The decoration of this unsigned pen box is of very high quality, and it may be the work of Sadiq himself. The top of the cover is divided into three panels, arranged horizontally. In the larger central panel an Indian prince with two attendants is receiving instruction from a sage on a moonlit terrace. In the panel to the right another prince presents a book to another sage during an encounter alfresco; behind the sage a number of deer have gathered. In the third panel, to the left, there is a depiction of Shaykh San'an and the Christian maiden.

The sides show a series of scenes of hunting, pastoral activities and dervish life, set in a continuous landscape. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have rather fine scrollwork in gold on a red ground.

The cover once bore an impression of the maker's seal, but this has been deliberately erased. Comparison with the erased impression on the inside of cat.104 (the physical structure of which is similar to cat.103 in every way) suggests that both impressions were made by the same seal, and both look very like the impression of the maker's seal on cat.41, which was manufactured by Muhammad Hashim al-Musawi and decorated by Sadiq in AH 1212 (AD 1797–8).

104

Pen box
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.9 × 4.5 × 4.1 cm
accession no. LAQ263

This pen box is very similar to cat.103, but the quality of the painting on the top and sides is slightly inferior, and it may be counted as a work of a close associate of Sadiq rather than of the master himself. Perhaps the most telling indication that this is so is the inclusion of lighted candles in the two smaller, lateral compositions on the top of the cover, where none occurs in cat.103. These make nonsense of the two alfresco compositions, originally meant to show two meetings by daylight. The sage on the right has a group of deer and a tree at his back but a prince on a terrace before him.

The sides show scenes with huntsmen, pastoralists and dervishes, and some figures wear Indian headgear. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have finely painted gold scrollwork on a red ground, which is almost identical to that on cat.103.

Another similarity is the presence of the maker's seal on the inside of the cover. In this case, however, it has been obliterated by wear rather than deliberate erasure. This seal, which may be that of Muhammad Hashim al-Musawi, links this pen box to the late 18th century, but an inscription in fine gold *nasta'līq* on the underside of the sliding compartment records that, 'It took form in accordance with the royal command in the year 106.' The intended meaning of this is that the pen box was made for Shah Sultan Husayn in AH 1106 (AD 1694–5). This inscription does not appear to be a later addition, not least because of its obscure position on the base of the sliding compartment. It may have been copied, along with the rest of the design, from a pen box of the late 17th century.

105

Pen box
Iran, AH 1287 (AD 1870–71)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4 × 4 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ426

The decoration of this penbox is close in style to that of cat.96 and 97, but the division of the principal surface into three panels and the version of *Visit to a sage* that occupies the central panel link the decoration to the late 18th-century group exemplified by cat.103 and 104. Cat.105 may therefore be taken as a later fusion of the two types. The two lateral panels contain two figural scenes that both include a naked child, but their significance is difficult to establish.

There are hunting scenes on the sides of the box, and the base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with gold floral scrollwork.



101, 102

102

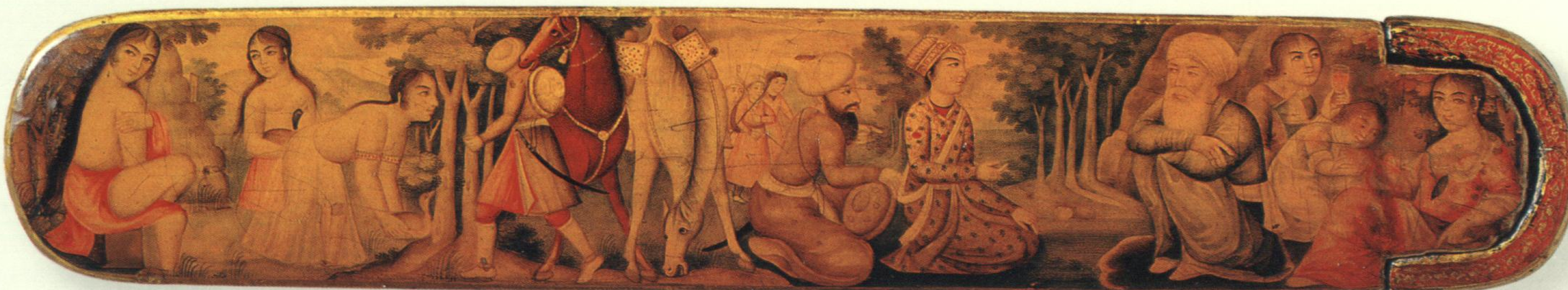
Pen box
Iran, first half of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25 × 4.7 × 4.2 cm
accession no. LAQ400

The top of the cover displays a version of *Visit to a sage* very close to that on cat. 97 but executed in a slightly later style. The main innovation is the insertion, to the right of the sage, of a figural group of a woman with a boy and a man drinking wine. This may represent the young Jahangir, the fruit of Akbar's visit to Shaykh Salim, with his parents.

The sides show scenes of rural life, with some male figures wearing the Qajar astrakhan headgear. This design is very similar to that on the sides of cat. 99. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold floral scrollwork on a red ground.





102

101

Pen box
Iran, early 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25 × 4.5 × 4 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Muhammad Zaman'
accession no. LAQ399

The version of *Visit to a sage* seen on this item clearly derived from the same source as that on cat.96 and 98, and the style of painting suggests that it was produced about the same time. It bears the signature of Muhammad Zaman and a date that should probably be read as AH 1107 (AD 1695–6), AH 1117 (AD 1705–6) or, less likely, as AH 1170 (AD 1756–7), but these possibilities may demonstrate only that the painter was aware of the late Safavid source of this type of decoration. The link with Muhammad Zaman's school is further reinforced by the verses inscribed in *shikastah* around the side of the sliding compartment, 'This choice pen box, which is a divinely blessed work of art, is an adornment for the masters of accomplishment and artistry. Because of the beauty of its design, a form as fair as a houri or fairy, it is a pleasant prospect for all men of sagacity.' These lines are very similar to those inscribed on cat.93 above, and both are similar to those on a 17th-century pen box attributable to Muhammad Zaman.[1]

The base of the cover has gold floral scrollwork on a red ground, and sketchy scrollwork of the same type appears on the base of the sliding compartment. As mentioned above, the sides of the sliding compartment bear four hemistichs of a quatrain written in *shikastah*. The script is in white on a red ground set with fragments of floral scrollwork in gold. Each hemistich is contained within a cartouche, and the cartouches are separated by quatrefoil medallions enclosing rosettes.

1. Zoka' 1354a, pp.45–6, and figs 4–7; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.786–7, and pl.64.








98, 99, 100

98

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1268 (AD 1851–2)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.9 × 3.7 × 3.9 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Shāh-i Najaf* ('O King of Najaf!')
accession no. LAQ32

The poses of most of the figures in this rendition of *Visit to a sage* are very close to those on cat.96, but the sleeping youth has been replaced by an older dervish, one of the lady's maids has disappeared, as has the lady's lapdog, and another dervish, playing a pipe, has been interposed between the prince and his attendant. The scenes on the sides are variations on the same theme: on one side the encounter is distinguished by the open book between the main figures; on the other the sage and his companions are warming their hands at a brazier as the prince arrives.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold scrollwork on a red ground.

The invocation to the Imam 'Ali on this pen box was used as a crypto-signature by the early 19th-century lacquer-painter Najaf 'Ali, who is reputed to have been a pupil of Sadiq.[1]

1. See Part Two, 'Najaf 'Ali and his circle'.

99

Pen box
Iran, first half of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23 × 3.9 × 3.9 cm; the varnish is very brown.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ398

The top of the cover displays almost the same version of *Visit to a sage* as cat.96 (only the female group on the left is different). The drawing is, however, less accomplished and certainly of a later date. The sides of the cover show the same rural scenes as cat.102, and it seems likely that the same stencil was used, as the figures were drawn on the same scale even though the surface is smaller; as a result, the tops of the heads of some have been chopped off.

The base of the cover has gold floral scrolls on a red ground, and the sides of the sliding compartment have similar gold motifs outlined in black on a dark-red ground.

100

Pen box
Iran, mid-19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.1 × 3.9 cm; the box contains a small plain inkpot of silver and brass.
accession no. LAQ506

The decoration of this unsigned pen box is unusual and was apparently executed in the mid-19th century by an artist under the influence of Muhammad Isma'il.[1] The painter also betrays signs of attempting to reproduce the style employed by Muhammad Zaman in the late 17th century, as in the use of exaggerated perspective in the centre of the principal composition. The scene to the right of this view into the distance is a curtailed version of *Visit to a sage*, while that to the left shows a very similar Indian prince visiting a group of dervishes who have gathered around a fire (compare the scene on the side of cat.98).

The sides are filled with a series of very varied scenes in a continuous landscape. These include a shepherd with his flock and a man tending a herd of cows, as well as two scenes with carriages of a European type, a group of figures around a fire, and an interview between a sage and a dervish. The base of the cover is red and is decorated with finely painted gold floral scrollwork, while the sides of the sliding compartment have an unusual design of stylized flowering plants on either side of a fruiting vine, all in gold on a black ground.

1. On this painter, see Part Two, 'Muhammad Isma'il'.









96, 97

The following items, which are of various styles and dates, illustrate the popularity among Iranian lacquer painters of an Indian theme that may be called *Visit to a sage*. This subject reflected the custom current among the Muslim rulers of India of visiting a Sufi master. One of the most celebrated instances was the visit by the Mughal emperor Akbar (*reg.* 1556–1605) to Shaykh Salim Chishti, who lived in a retreat near Sikri.

Akbar's only male offspring had died soon after birth, and he went to see the Shaykh in his search for a remedy. As his son Jahangir recorded in his memoirs, 'One day, while meditating, he inadvertently asked [the Shaykh], "How many sons will I have?" He answered, "The Giver who bestows without obligation will grant you three sons." My father then said, "I vow that I will entrust my first son to your care and will give him into the lap of your love and affection to protect and preserve him." The Shaykh accepted this and said, "May he be blessed. We shall give him our own name."'[1] As a result, Jahangir's mother was sent to stay with Shaykh Salim shortly before giving birth on 30 August 1569, and the child was given the name Salim, among others (Jahangir was his regnal name). Subsequently, Akbar built his capital of Fathpur at Sikri, partly in honour of the Shaykh. Given the importance of Shaykh Salim to the Mughals, it is not surprising that miniature paintings of *Visit to a sage* began to appear around 1600.[2]

Versions current in the mid-17th century have been interpreted as genre scenes, representing idealized studies of royal piety rather than actual incidents,[3] and this development of the theme in India may explain the existence of variants, such as that seen on cat.103, in Qajar Iran. In Iran, *Visit to a sage* was a speciality of Sadiq and his followers from the late 18th century onwards, but its first recorded occurrence on bookbinder's lacquer is from AH 1084 (AD 1673–4), when Muhammad Zaman used it on a pen box he painted for Shah Sulayman;[4] the theme therefore dates back to the very beginnings of the decoration of lacquer with miniature painting. Although there are evident stylistic differences between the late Safavid example and those from the Qajar period, in many cases the principal elements of the composition are the same. On Muhammad Zaman's pen box of AH 1084 the sage is seated on the right, facing the Indian prince who has come to consult him; the prince's closest companions are ranged behind him; and the remainder of his suite await their master to the left. This last group includes a servant who struggles to control the prince's horse and in the later versions, such as that on cat.96, he is the only member of the group depicted. The clear parallels between these compositions may be evidence of a continuous tradition between the later 17th and the later 18th century, but the lack of examples from the intervening period means that the theme may have been re-introduced with booty from Nadir Shah's Indian campaign of 1738–9.[5]



98 detail of cover

1. Jahangir, pp.1–2, translated by Wheeler M. Thackston (S.C. Welch *et al.* 1987, p.273).
2. See Beach 1978, no.61, for an example.
3. Ehnbom 1985, p.64.
4. Zoka' 1354a, fig.9; Diba 1989a, pl.4; Soudavar 1992, p.377, fig.51 (detail).
5. A niche oil painting of this subject (in a private collection), dating from the second quarter of the 19th century, is inscribed *maktab-i Khusraw* ('Khusraw's school'), perhaps indicating a variant version in which the young Indian receiving instruction is the poet Amir Khusraw.

96

Pen box
Iran, AH 1193 (AD 1779–80)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.5 × 4.4 × 4.2 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ320

The principal decoration on this pen box and the five that follow consists of closely related versions of *Visit to a sage*. In each case this scene, like those on the sides of cat.96, is set in a continuous landscape. The primary group of figures, which includes the sage himself and the prince who has come to consult him, are shown right of centre. In this example the prince can be identified by his rich attire, which includes a cloak of gold brocade and trousers decorated with spiralling gold dots. A single attendant sits to the prince's left, and the group is completed by a page attempting to control a horse. The narrow space to the right of the sage is occupied by a young dervish asleep beneath a tree, while the larger composition to the left of the page shows a young woman, recumbent and fondling a dog; two maids are in attendance. This reworking of the theme seen on Muhammad Zaman's pen box of 1673–4 contains fewer figures, but the addition of the female group on the left, which has replaced the Europeanizing seascape, may be an indication that the scene represented the visit of Akbar to Shaykh Salim Chishti: the young woman would be Akbar's wife, who had failed to produce a male heir.

The sides show episodes from the romances of Khusraw and Shirin and of Yusuf and Zulaykha, namely, *Khusraw spies Shirin bathing* and *Yusuf's visit to the aged Zulaykha*. The same scenes appear on the sides of cat.97, and the style of decoration of the two pen boxes is so close that they are probably by the same hand. This was presumably Muhammad Sadiq, who used the crypto-signature *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd*.[1]

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with gold floral scrollwork.

1. See p.74 above.

97

Pen box
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.4 × 4 × 4 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ389

In addition to the invocation *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd*, this box is inscribed with the date AH 1145 (AD 1732–3), but the painting appears to be by the same hand as cat.96, which is dated 1779–80. This latter date accords better with the style of painting.

The top and sides of the cover have figural scenes set in continuous landscapes, in the same order as on cat.96: a version of *Visit to a sage* on the top and *Khusraw spies Shirin bathing* and *Yusuf's visit to the aged Zulaykha* on the sides. There are a number of variations in the details, however. On the top of the cover the horses in the centre are turned towards the viewer, for example, and the female group on the left are engaged in bathing; both features recur on cat.102.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with fruiting grape vines in gold. The denser design on the base of the cover includes two herons.


95 top of lid


95 inside of lid



95

95

Casket

Iran, 1770s or 1780s

Rectangular papier-mâché body with four shallow feet, the lid with a flat top and convex sides, 32.5 × 23 × 16.4 cm
accession no. LAQ357

The top of the lid illustrates a scene from the story of Shaykh San'an and the Christian maiden, which occurs in the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* of Farid al-Din 'Attar. In the centre of the composition the maiden can be seen offering the Shaykh a cup of wine, and both are surrounded by numerous companions. The assorted foreigners who accompany the Christian maiden include two young black men, an Armenian priest, and two women, one of whom carries a pig, while the Shaykh's followers are dervishes of varied age and costume. The large building in the background may have been inspired by the Armenian cathedral at New Julfa in Isfahan. The surrounding convex surfaces show four hunting scenes; some of the huntsmen wear the Zand turban, which suggests that the casket was painted no later than the 1780s, when the Qajars replaced the Zands as the ruling group in Iran. In addition, the style of the painting is very close to that of Mirza Baba, who had entered Qajar service by 1789 (see cat.91).

The inside of the lid is decorated with a favourite scene from the romance of Yusuf and Zulaykha. Again, the main figures are distinguished by being placed at the centre of the composition in a rather formal manner; the foreground is filled with Zulaykha's lady companions in various poses. Yusuf has entered from the left, bearing a dish of fruit, while Zulaykha is seated to the right of centre and wears a coat with the characteristic Zand frogging and comparatively narrow embroidered trousers. Of the surrounding concave surfaces, the longer sides bear pairs of hunting scenes, and either end shows a young couple entertaining one another on a terrace.

The sides of the casket are painted with court scenes, including one of King Solomon sitting in state and one of Shah Tahmasp entertaining the Mughal emperor Humayun. The base is red, with a lobed medallion and pendants filled with flowers and a bird on a black ground. The interior is plain brown.





93, 94

94

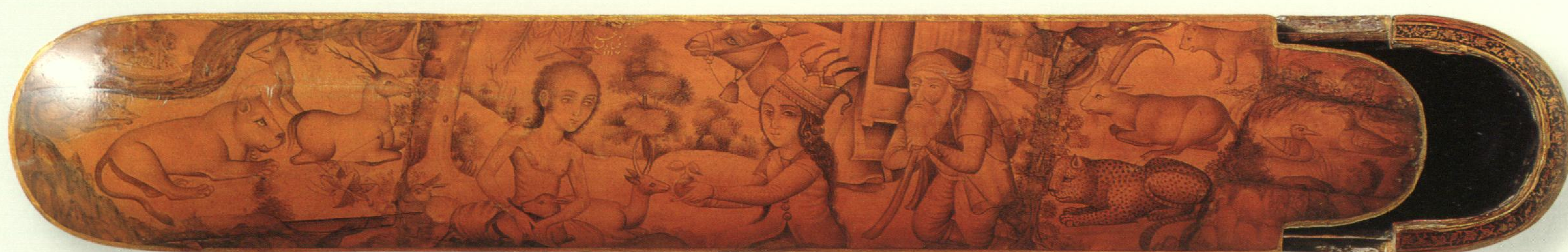
Pen box
Iran, probably early 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25 × 4.2 × 4.7 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ260

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with figural scenes – all popular episodes from the 'Five Tales' of Nizami and other Persian romances – in grisaille on a ground of a rich coffee colour. The top of the cover, for example, is occupied by *Layla visits Majnun in the desert*, and one side by *Khusraw spies Shirin bathing*. The others involve Farhad, Yusuf and Zulaykha, and Bahram Gur and Fitnah in the episode often referred to as *Practice makes perfect*. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are black, with narrow borders of gold scrollwork.

This box is fine work but, despite the signature and the fact that it is inscribed with the year AH 1117 (AD 1705–6), it certainly dates from the Qajar period: the compositions tend to be cut off along the bottom, for example, and the crowns depicted are of an early Qajar type.





94

92
Pen box
Iran, AH 1205 (AD 1790–91)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.3 × 3.7 × 3.5 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The most humble 'Ali Riza al-Husayni al-Qa'ini'
accession no. LAQ50

The top of the cover is divided into three vertical panels, which are framed by gold scrollwork. The central panel shows a young woman holding a rosebud, while those above and below show a European carriage crossing a bridge. On each of the sides, a panel showing a man killing a lion (compare the side of cat.105) is flanked by two further panels, one pair depicting bridges, the other, European mansions. These panels, too, are framed by gold scrollwork.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are decorated by gold scrolls on a red ground.

Karimzadeh Tabrizi recorded the painter of cat.92, which is dated AH 1205 (AD 1790–91), as the artist responsible for the binding on a copy of the *Masnavī* of Rumi in the Gulistan Library, which was signed by 'Ali Riza ibn Muhammad 'Ali al-Husayni al-Qa'ini and dated AH 1266 (AD 1849–50).[1] The Gulistan manuscript was copied by Muhammad 'Ali al-Qa'ini, whom Karimzadeh made 'Ali Riza's brother, but, according to Mehdi Bayani, this Muhammad 'Ali Qa'ini died in Tehran in AH 1305 (AD 1887–8).[2] It is unlikely, then, that a man who died in the late 1880s would have a brother who painted a pen box in the early 1790s.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.384, no.674.
2. Bayani 1345–58, III, pp.795–97, no.1170.

93
Pen box
Iran, AH 1209 (AD 1794–5)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.3 × 4.3 × 3.9 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Mirza Baba.'
accession no. LAQ274

The top of this fine pen box shows three hunting scenes separated by two oval bust portraits of young women, all but identical to those on cat.89. In this case, however, the style is that of the late 18th century. The sides show views of buildings very similar to those on the sides of cat.91. There are two views on each side, and they are divided and flanked by bust portraits, six in all. Four of the latter are of young women, one is an Indian prince, and the sixth depicts a European gentleman. The ends display a group of flowers on a yellow ground. The base of the cover is red, with gold floral scrollwork of fine quality.

The sides of the sliding compartment are embellished with a quatrain in praise of the pen box: 'This choice pen box, which is a divinely blessed work of art, is a gathering-place for the tools of perfection and artistry. Because of the beauty of its design and its wealth of ornament and decoration, it is a pleasant prospect for all men of sagacity.'

The verses are written in elegant *nasta'līq* on a red ground embellished with fine gold scrollwork. Very similar verses appear on another pen box by Mirza Baba,[1] but they appear to have been composed in the 17th century, for they were inscribed on a pen box attributable to Muhammad Zaman.[2]

1. Sotheby's, London, 28 April 1993, lot no.39.
2. See cat.101.





91, 92





91, 92

90

Instrument case with shuttered mirror
Isfahan, Jumada I 1187
(July–August 1773)

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 23 × 15.8 cm, and fitted shutter, 21 × 14 cm, with a fitted drawer, from which the instruments are now missing. The decoration is signed, 'The work of the most humble Muhammad Baqir son of Muhammad 'Ali, in Isfahan, the seat of sovereignty, over a period of 11 months. It reached completion in the month of Jumada'l-Awwal 1187.'
accesssion no. LAQ11

The decoration is very fine work indeed. The main figure on the outer face of the shutter is a lady richly costumed in a European 'classical' style. She is examining jewels, clothes and mirrors, apparently aided by a diminutive maid. Another maid approaches, bearing a covered golden bowl on a tray and accompanied by a young girl with a bowl of fruit. The background consists of a draped pillar with a landscape beyond.

The inner face of the shutter, which carries the long inscription,[1] shows another richly clad lady holding a fan; she stands at a window, with draped curtains above.

The back of the case shows a scene closely based on an *Adoration of the shepherds*, against a background that consists again of a draped column and a landscape with buildings and trees.

The fitted surface of the drawer is decorated with gold scrollwork on a red ground.

1. On the significance of this inscription, and the identity of Muhammad Baqir ibn Muhammad 'Ali, see pp.75–6 above.

91

Pen box
Perhaps Isfahan, AH 1180 (AD 1766–7)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.5 × 4.1 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The most humble Mirza Baba'
accession no. LAQ341

The composition on the top of the cover is arranged in vertical format, and depicts a girl in European dress standing in the middle of a wooded landscape, with an old man at her shoulder. The sides display perspective views of palaces and gardens (compare cat.93), divided by oval bust portraits of a young Indian prince and his lady and two almost identical girls in European dress. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with gold floral scrollwork.

The pen box is the earliest recorded work signed by Mirza Baba, who was one of the most celebrated court painters of Fath 'Ali Shah. Mirza Baba may have worked for Muhammad Karim Khan Zand (*reg.* 1750–1779) before entering the service of the Qajars in the 1780s: a fine drawing of a dragon and a phoenix, formerly in the Pozzi collection, was signed by Mirza Baba at Astarabad, the original home of the dynasty, in AH 1203 (AD 1789).[1]

Mirza Baba appears to have painted at least two series of historical portraits in oils for Qajar palaces, one in AH 1204 (AD 1789–90),[2] the other in AH 1214 (AD 1799–1800).[3] Other works in oils are a *Still life with pomegranates* of AH 1208 (AD 1793–4)[4] and at least two fine portraits of Fath 'Ali Shah, one of which is dated AH 1204 (AD 1789–90) and was presented to the East India Company in 1806.[5]

Mirza Baba achieved the status of *naqqāsh-bāshī* before AH 1217 (AD 1802–3), when he painted the lavish illumination, lacquer binding and the two fine royal portraits in the copy of the Shah's *dīvān* sent to the Prince of Wales (later King George IV) in 1812.[6] It is with reference to the dispatch of this gift that Sir William Ouseley described Mirza Baba as 'the chief painter or *nakásh báshí*' in terms that suggest that he was the current holder of the post;[7] it therefore seems unlikely that he was the Mirza Baba whose house in Tehran was occupied by Sir Gore Ouseley's staff in 1811–12, and whom Sir William Ouseley reported had been executed some years before for falsifying accounts.[8]

In terms of the decorative arts, Mirza Baba was responsible for some fine painted enamel and églomisé glass, as well as lacquer wares. In addition to cat.91, 93 and 120, these include a pen box depicting the battle of Chaldiran, executed in AH 1200 (AH 1785–6).[9] His masterpiece in this medium is a large casket in the Museum of Ancient Iran, Tehran, which was made for Fath 'Ali Shah in Dhu'l-Hijjah 1218 (March–April 1804).[10] It appears that Mirza Baba painted the top of the lid, while the rest of the work was done by an artist called Muhammad Mahdi.[11]

1. Robinson 1979, p.333; 1986, p.5; 1991, p.874.
2. Represented by Falk 1972, no.2.
3. Represented by Falk 1972, fig.11.
4. Falk 1972, no.3.
5. Falk 1972, fig.12.
6. Windsor, Royal Library, MS.A/4, Holmes MS.152; Robinson 1965, fig.5; 1967, no.95; see also Adle 1980, n.167, on pp.66–7.
7. Ouseley 1823, II, pp.372–3.
8. Robinson 1964a, p.104; Falk 1972, pp.25–32.
9. Boroumand 1366, pp.109–10.
10. Inv.no.4387; Adle 1980, fig.32.
11. Robinson 1986, p.5; on this painter, see also Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1273–86, no.1315.



90 back of case



90 front of case with shutter



90 inner face of shutter





89

89

Pen box
Iran, AH 1175 (AD 1761–2)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.2 × 3.9 × 4.2 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Ṣādiq az luṭf-i 'Alī ashraf shud* ('Sadiq became most noble through 'Ali's grace.')
accession no. LAQ215

The top of the cover bears a horizontal composition consisting of three panels showing mounted huntsmen, divided by two oval bust portraits of young women. The sides also have hunting scenes and oval portraits, one of an Indian prince. The panels and ovals are separated by gold arabesque scroll-work. The base of the cover shows flowers and a butterfly on a crimson ground, while the sides of the sliding compartment are black, with a close-set design of vines in gold.

The decoration of this pen box is of particularly fine quality, although this has been partly obscured by the inferior repainting of the two female portraits on the top of the cover. The iconography is very much that of the late Safavid period, to the extent that the huntsmen wear fur-trimmed hats of the Safavid, rather than Zand, type.

The body of the box has cracked on one side at some time in the past, and has been expertly repaired.





88

Pen box
Iran, AH 1169 (AD 1755–6)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.7 × 4.3 × 4 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ453

The top and sides of the cover carry panels containing figural subjects, divided by oval bust portraits of girls. The central panel on the top shows a young Iranian in royal apparel in conversation with an Indian prince; the encounter takes place in a landscape, and the prince is accompanied by two diminutive attendants. The other panels show angels, ladies and holy men. The base of the cover is decorated with gold vine scrolls on red, while the sliding compartment is black with plain gold rules.

















, 85, 86, 87






82, 83

82

Pen box
Iran, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.7 × 3.7 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ422

The finely painted decoration of the top and sides of the cover consists of a well-spaced design of roses on a black ground, with a small bird perched on the central spray on the top. The small-scale floral scroll painted in the borders is identical to that on top of the cap of cat.81.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, decorated with gold floral scrollwork.

83

Pen box
Iran, later 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ180

The decoration on the top and sides of the cover shows a curious combination of sprays of naturalistic flowers and conventional motifs in gold. Similar motifs derived from illumination are usually found in the overall patterning on the base of the cover of such boxes and on the sides of the sliding compartment, but here these surfaces are decorated with individual flowering vines, in gold on red.

84

Pen box
Isfahan, late 18th or early 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25.7 × 4.6 × 4.2 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of the maker Muhammad Baqir ibn Ja'far al-Husayni; the decoration is unsigned.
accession no. LAQ447

The top and sides of the cover carry rich designs of roses and other flowers on a crimson ground, while the base is black, with floral scrolls in gold. The sides of the sliding compartment have crimson panels of floral motifs, painted in colours.

The undated seal of Muhammad Baqir ibn Ja'far al-Husayni is also found on cat.141, which was decorated by Mulla 'Ali Muhammad in AH 1231 (AD 1816–17). We may therefore date this pen box to the same period.

85

Pen box
Isfahan, perhaps late 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.3 × 3.8 × 3.9 cm
accession no. LAQ246

The sparkling red ground of the top and sides of the cover is set with birds, butterflies, flowers and hazelnuts. The black base has gold floral scrollwork. The sides of the sliding compartment are also black and are decorated in gold with a pattern of formal plants that grow from the base line.

86

Pen box
Iran, AH 1207 (AD 1792–3)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.2 × 4 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ157

The panels of flowers on a sparkling brown ground that decorate the top and sides of the cover alternate with oval bust portraits of European and Indian girls and youths. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with two types of floral scrolls in gold.

87

Pen box
Isfahan, perhaps late 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.9 × 4.3 × 4.3 cm; the sliding compartment contains an inkpot with a plain silver top and a brass well.
accession no. LAQ245

The top and sides of the cover carry a rich design of birds and butterflies among roses, hazelnuts, irises, hyacinths and other flowers on a deep-crimson ground. The stems grow from the base line and, somewhat unusually for this group, there is an attempt at representing the earth from which they grow.

The base of the cover is red and is decorated with a floral scroll painted in two tones of gold and arranged in an original manner. The sides of the sliding compartment have sketchy gold floral scrollwork on a black ground.









80, 81





, 81

80

Pen box
Iran, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.8 × 4.3 × 4.5 cm
accession no. LAQ186

The principal surfaces of this pen box are finely painted with widely spaced flower-and-bird motifs on a sparkling brown ground. Some of the plants are etiolated versions of the broken stump that has burst back to life, and between these there are oversized flowering plants, including scabious, poppy, hyacinth, tulip, carnation, iris and hydrangea. The designs are framed by narrow borders with conventional floral motifs in gold on black; these may have been created in order to supplement a stencil made for a smaller box, for almost exactly the same compositions appear on cat.81, but without the border. It is cat.80, though, that displays the finer work. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are plain red with a frame ruled in gold.

81

Pen box
Iran, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.2 × 3.9 × 4.2 cm
accession no. LAQ52

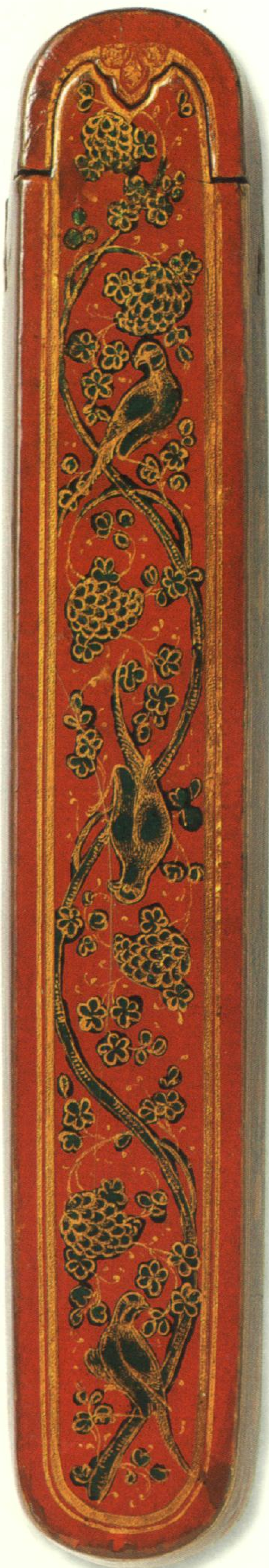
The most striking feature of this pen box is the magnificent black ground used in the decoration of the top and sides of the cover; indeed, the colour is so rich and glossy that it resembles the black of Japanese *ro-iro* lacquer. The flower-and-bird compositions set against this ground were evidently produced using the same stencils as cat.80, although in this case the painter has taken a number of short cuts – a twig omitted in one place, a bird left out in another – and the execution is a little less accomplished. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have fine gold floral scrollwork on a red ground.








77, 78, 79



77 base

77

Pen box

Iran, AH 1196 (AD 1781–2)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.7 × 4.1 × 3.7 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ417

The top and sides of the cover bear an uncrowded design of various flowers, mostly roses, on a chocolate-brown ground. The base has birds on a trailing vine, executed in translucent green and outlined in gold, on a red ground (compare cat.67). The sides of the sliding compartment also have a red ground, with floral scrolls in gold between spotted black borders.

78

Pen box

Iran, AH 1208 (AD 1793–4)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.4 × 4 × 4 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ380

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with birds among roses and hazelnuts, on a dark-brown ground. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are plain maroon, edged with gold rules.

79

Pen box

Iran, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.9 × 4 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ432

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with birds and butterflies among various flowers, all set on a sparkling background of very dark brown.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold floral scrolls on a red ground.



76

76

Pen box
Iran, AH 1201 (AD 1786–7)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.2 × 4 × 4 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Muhammad Baqir.'
accession no. LAQ270

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with a bird, flowers and hazelnuts on a dark-brown ground. There is very fine floral scrollwork on the base of the cover and vines on the sides of the sliding compartment, all worked in gold on red.

This item may be the work of Muhammad Baqir ibn Muhammad 'Ali, who painted cat. 90.





75
Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1141 (AD 1728–9)

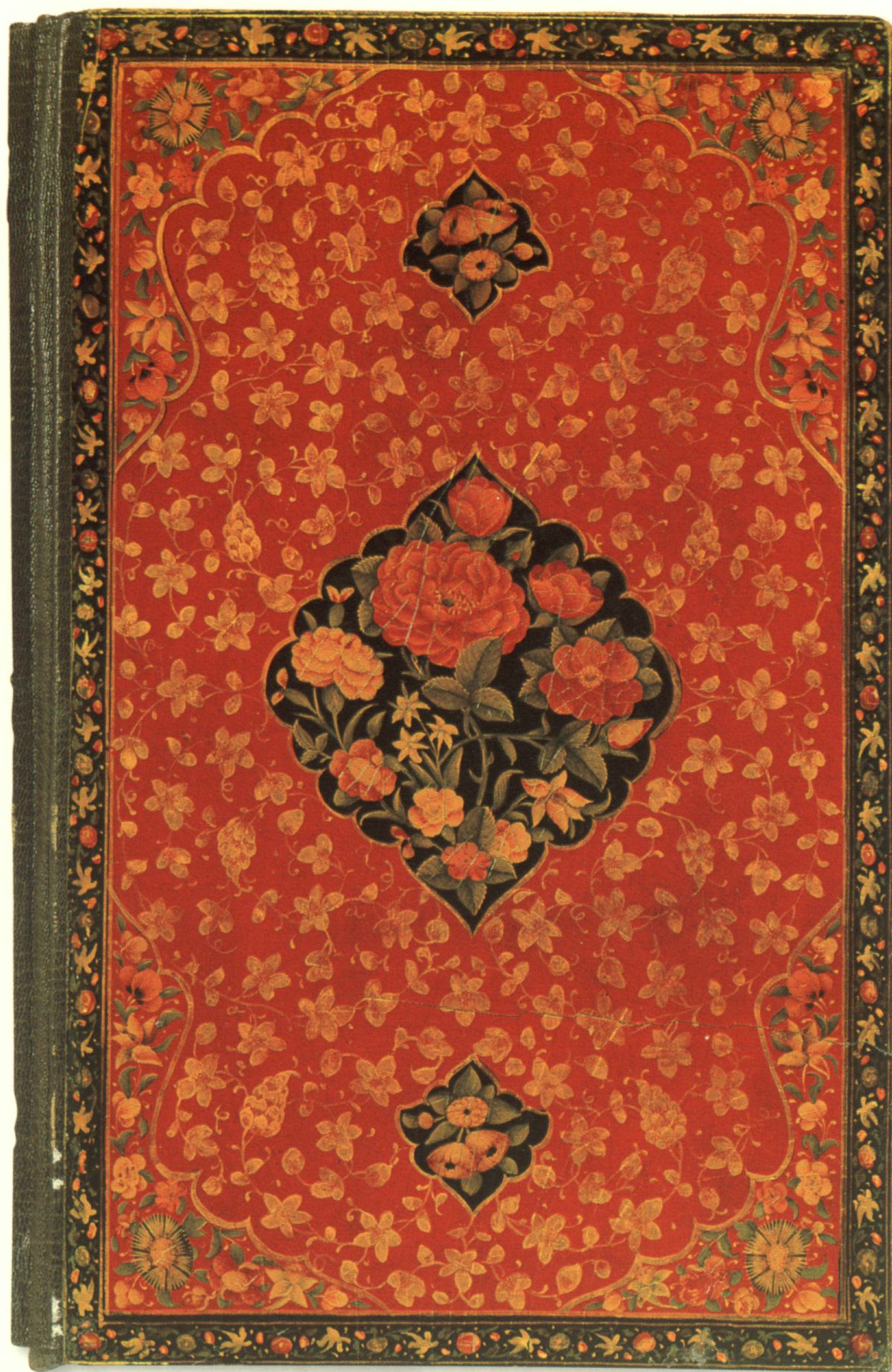
Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.9 × 4.3 × 3.7 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Bāqir al-ʿUlūm* ('O you who are well-versed in knowledge!')
accession no. LAQ21

The top of the cover displays a bird among roses and hazelnuts on a pale-brown ground. On the sides there are various flowering plants and shrubs. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have very fine floral scrollwork in gold on a red ground.

This pen box may be by the same artist as cat. 56 and 57 above.



74 upper cover



74 doublure

74

Binding of a Qur'an
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 29.4 × 18.2 cm, with leather spine
accession no. QUR258

The binding is attached to a Qur'an manuscript copied by Muhsin al-Shirazi al-Husayni in AH 1202 (AD 1787–8). The outer covers display a large-scale design of roses, narcissi, tulips and hazelnuts against a sparkling gold ground. The narrow black frame has a repeating diaper pattern in gold. The doublures have a red ground covered with floral scrollwork in gold. Against this are set a central lobed medallion, with pendants, and corner-pieces. The medallion and pendants display a variety of flowers against a black ground, while the corner-pieces have garlands set on a red ground enhanced with gold tendrils. The narrow border has a repeat pattern of flowers, painted on a black ground.



73 front of case with shutter



73 back of case

72

Pair of book covers
Iran, first half of the 19th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 18.3 × 12 cm with a red leather spine. The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ468

The outer covers display finely painted designs of massed flowers, including single and double roses, narcissi, apple blossom, scabious, tulips and primulas, on a sparkling red background. These compositions appear to be reduced versions of that on cat.70, and the sparkling ground is also a common feature. The doublures show a narcissus plant flanked by other flowers at the base; the background is brown. Both compositions are framed within black borders with gold scrollwork.

73

Mirror case with shutter
Shiraz, *circa* 1800

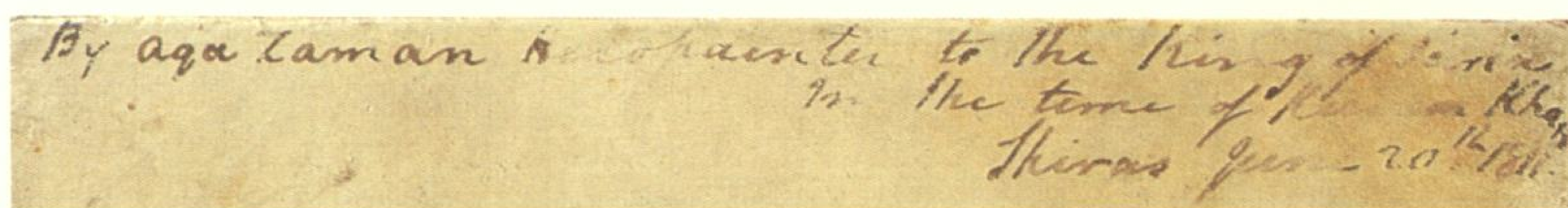
Rectangular papier-mâché case, 21.7 × 14.3 cm, and hinged shutter, 19.7 × 12.5 cm; silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ476

The back of the case and the outside of the shutter have been very finely painted with a composition of a single small bird perched on a luxuriant rose-bush, with carnations, hyacinths and other flowers below, and a butterfly at one side. The compositions are similar but not identical: for example, the bird on the case appears bright and alert, while that on the shutter is puffed up and sleepy. In both cases, the background is of sparkling gold, and there is some surface cracking. The band of illumination on the front rim of the case is very similar to that on the outer cover of cat.61.

The inner face of the shutter has been primed with gesso but not painted. An inscription on it, probably by Sir William Ouseley, reads, 'By Aqa Zaman Head painter to the King of Persia / In the time of Kareem Khan / Shiraz June 20th 1811'. An album from the Ouseley collection in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, contains a painting of a court lady with a similar inscription, 'This was drawn for me by a painter of Shiraz 1811. Wm Ouseley'.[1]

The blank interior of the shutter may mean that the mirror case was unfinished when Sir William Ouseley bought it. But it may also indicate that mirror cases with flower-and-bird decoration on the exterior were produced speculatively, and that the inner face of the shutter was painted with a portrait or figural subject to the order of the eventual purchaser.

1. Robinson 1958, no.1218.



73 inscription on inner face of shutter





72 outer cover, doublure



71 (LAQ 456)



70 (LAQ 351)

69

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, AH 1231 (AD 1815–16)

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 28.6 × 19.4 cm, and fitted shutter, 26 × 16.7 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ472

The back of this exquisite mirror case and the outside of its shutter display small birds among flowers and hazelnuts on a buff ground. The inside of the cover has a scene from the romance of Yusuf and Zulaykha. The heroine wears a crown and sits on a throne, holding an apple, while Yusuf appears behind a low wall. In the foreground, Zulaykha's maids and an old woman appear in various states of distraction. The women wear upper garments with gold frogging, and comparatively narrow trousers. All three compositions are framed by a floral border on a black ground.

This item is the work of a celebrated artist called Muhammad Zaman.[1] Like the even more famous Muhammad Zaman (ibn Hajji Yusuf of Qum), who flourished in the second half of the 17th century, this painter sometimes employed the invocation addressed to the Twelfth Imam, *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān*, as a crypto-signature. Muhamman Zaman worked as a court painter for both Karim Khan Zand (see cat.73) and for Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar.[2]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.816–20, no.1038.
2. See also cat.70–73, 77, 78 and 86.

70, 71

Pair of album covers
Iran, late 18th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 39.5 × 24.2 cm, now set in leather-covered frames, each 45.5 × 30.5 cm
accession nos LAQ351, LAQ456

Cat.70 and 71 are most probably the front and back covers from the same binding, to judge by their identical dimensions and the similar frames in which they were set. Cat.70 was framed to display an outer face, while cat.71 illustrates one of the doublures. The frames obscure the other surfaces, but one may assume that they were decorated with similar compositions.

Cat.70 displays a flower-and-bird design of high quality on a dark-red, sparkling background. The slight damage to the left-hand edge was presumably caused when the leather spine was removed.

Cat.71, on the other hand, is painted with the popular scene of Yusuf entering the apartment of Zulaykha, whose maidservants are overcome by his beauty. The scene is set on a terrace, which overlooks a landscape with several large buildings. Yusuf wears a round turban and a full-skirted garment that comes half-way down his calves in the late Safavid fashion, while two of the 12 ladies wear the comparatively narrow trousers with diagonal embroidered patterns that were characteristic of the Zand period.

These covers are probably the work of Muhammad Zaman, the court painter under Karim Khan Zand and Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar (compare cat.69 and 72).



70 detail


69 inner face of shutter


69 outer face of shutter


69 back of case



68 back of case



68 front of case with shutter



68 inner face of shutter





top and side of cover

66

Set of two panels
Iran, AH 1176 (AD 1762–3)

Wooden boards coated with papier-mâché, each 34 × 25.5 cm; the boards are 1.1 cm thick. The decoration on one panel is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to your promise!')
accession no. LAQ350

One face of each panel is decorated with a flower-and-bird composition of very high quality, set against a black ground and within a floral frame.

The other faces were presumably left plain, as they were painted with architectural subjects some 20 years later (see cat.127 below).

67

Pen box
Iran, AH 1180 (AD 1766–7)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 21.4 × 3.8 × 3.6 cm. The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to your promise!')
accession no. LAQ379

The top and sides of the cover display a very fine flower-and-bird design, with roses, hyacinths and sprays of various flowers, all on a sparkling brown ground. The base shows birds on vine scrolls, executed in translucent green with gold outlines, on a red ground (compare the base of cat.77). The sides of the sliding compartment have gold floral scrolls, also on a red ground.



67 detail of base

68

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, AH 1204 (AD 1789–90)

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 20 × 13.7 cm, and hinged shutter, 18 × 11.7 cm; silver hinges and hasp. The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ12

The back of the case and the outer face of the shutter are finely painted with flower-and-bird motifs on a light-brown ground. The inside of the shutter shows a young couple in European costume. She sits on a terrace, with looped curtains above and a landscape with a tree and a large building in the background. A small gazelle lies at her feet, and the youth offers her a rose.



66



65 front of case with shutter



65 back of case



65 inner face of shutter



64 back of case



64 front of case with shutter



64 inner face of shutter

63

Binding of a devotional manuscript
Isfahan, AH 1168 (AD 1754–5)

Papier-mâché boards, each 22 × 13.4 cm, and modern black leather spine.
The decoration is signed, 'It was painted by the most humble 'Ali Ashraf.'
accession no. MSS381

The manuscript to which this binding is attached contains a number of religious texts, including the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah* and the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*. It was copied by Khudadad al-Bakhtiyari for Khwajah Khidr Khan ibn Mulla Hajji Muhammad and completed in AH 1169 (AD 1755–6), one year after the binding was made by 'Ali Ashraf, while the illuminated dedication was completed in AH 1170 (AD 1756–7). It is not, however, unusual for lacquer bindings of the 18th and 19th centuries to predate the manuscripts to which they were attached.

The outer covers have dense floral compositions on black surrounded by a frame containing a repeat pattern of smaller flowers, also on black. A similar frame surrounds the red field of the doublures, which have a central arabesque medallion and pendants, with more flowers on a black ground.

64

Mirror case with shutter
Isfahan, AH 1152 (AD 1739–40)

Octagonal papier-mâché case, 16.8 × 13.2 cm, and hinged shutter, 15 × 11.5 cm, with gilded brass hinges and hasp.
The decoration is inscribed, *Huwa! Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast* ('He! After Muhammad 'Ali is the most noble.')
accession no. LAQ465

The back of the case and the outer surface of the shutter are filled with flower-and-bird designs of the highest quality; that on the back of the case is on a black ground, while that on the outside of the shutter is set against a sparkling red ground. The inside of the shutter is divided by gold fillets into a frame, field and central lobed medallion, all filled with arrangements of smaller, more stylized flowers.

65

Mirror case with shutter
Isfahan, AH 1166 (AD 1752–3)

Seven-sided papier-mâché case, 15 × 11.5 cm, and hinged shutter, 12.8 × 9.8 cm; silver hinges and hasp.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble 'Ali Ashraf.'
accession no. LAQ278

The back of the case and the outside of the shutter are decorated with birds, butterflies and flowers on a dark-red ground, while the inside of the shutter displays a bust portrait of a girl inside a lobed medallion on a sparkling gold ground.

The decoration of this piece is very close to that of a mirror case formerly in the collection of Sir John Pope-Hennessy, which was signed in the same manner in AH 1169 (AD 1755–6).[1] In this case the design had to be adapted to the odd shape of the mirror, which may originally have formed part of an imported European wall-mirror.

1. Robinson 1991, pls 10–11.





63 outer covers



63 doublure







62 top and side of cover; side of sliding compartment



61 outer cover

61

Book cover
Iran, mid-18th century

Papier-mâché board, 9 × 17.1 cm
accession no. LAQ481

The outer face of the cover has a narrow frame of delicate scrollwork, which surrounds a black ground on which a mass of narcissi, roses, carnations, tulips and other flowers are shown growing from one of the long sides. The execution is very fine.

On the doublure, three flowering plants – a narcissus between two hyacinths – are set against a red ground, with a single butterfly above the narcissus.

Like cat.18 above, the horizontal format of this cover suggests that it was designed for a manuscript of *safīnah* form. However, the remnants of the black leather spine along the bottom of the board indicate that it was used in a binding of vertical format.

62

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1162 (AD 1748–9)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.3 × 3.9 × 3.5 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast* ('After Muhammad 'Ali is the most noble.')
accession no. LAQ401
published Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pl.111

This pen box is an outstanding example of its type, both for its technical quality and the composition. The top and sides of the cover were prepared with a sparkling red ground by a threefold process. First the surface was covered with gold leaf, which was coated with varnish. While the varnish was still damp ground fragments of a scintillating material such as mother-of-pearl or pyrites were sprinkled on to it. Finally, a layer of red varnish was applied over the whole surface. The motifs were then painted over this ground, as slight damage to one of the flowers on the side shows.

The design on the top of the cover consists of five stumps which have burst back to life: a flowering rose bush, a hazel with nuts, and three tiny fruit trees in blossom. A violet plant in flower pokes up above the base line, but otherwise the smaller flowering plants that grow close to the earth are restricted to the sides. Here we find violets, carnations, tulips, primroses, poppies and others. The conventions of the school of Muhammad Zaman allowed this mixing of flowers and nuts of different seasons (compare cat.26, inside the lid).

The base of the cover is plain olive-green, with a frame ruled in gold. This has suffered some damage and has been crudely repaired. The exterior of the sliding compartment is red, stippled to imitate leather. The sides are painted with a running pattern of trumpet-like flowers that occurs in this position on a pen box painted by Hajji Muhammad, one of the painters who may have been 'Ali Ashraf's master, in AH 1122 (AD 1710–11).[1]

The signature on this pen box is very similar to that on cat.51, where the signature and date form an integral part of the decoration. There are also many similarities of technique and design between the two: in both cases the outlines of the exquisitely drawn floral motifs have been pricked.

1. Tehran, Museum of Ancient Iran, inv.no.4373; Adle 1980, figs 28, 29.



62 detail







58, 59, 60







58, 59, 60







, 59, 60

58
Pen box
Iran, 18th century

Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with straight ends, 27.2 × 6 × 5.2 cm
accession no. LAQ10

The top of the lid and the sides of the body are decorated with horizontal compositions showing birds amid flowers and hazelnuts on a sparkling dark-brown background. The sides of the lid have gold scrollwork decoration on a red ground, the base is plain red with a narrow gold frame, and the interior is painted dull gold.

59
Pen box
Isfahan, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.5 × 4 × 3.5 cm
accession no. LAQ4

The top and sides of the cover are painted with a horizontal design of small birds among roses and other flowers. Two of the birds have joined their bills in a 'kiss', while another has caught a grub. This pen box is very close to cat.60, not only in the decoration of its principal surfaces but also in the type of gold floral scrollwork on a red ground used on the base of the cover and on the sides of the sliding compartment.

60
Pen box
Isfahan, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.6 × 4.2 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ145

The top and sides of the cover are decorated with birds, flowers and hazelnuts on a black ground, in a manner very similar to cat.59. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold scrollwork on a red ground, which also closely resembles that on cat.59.

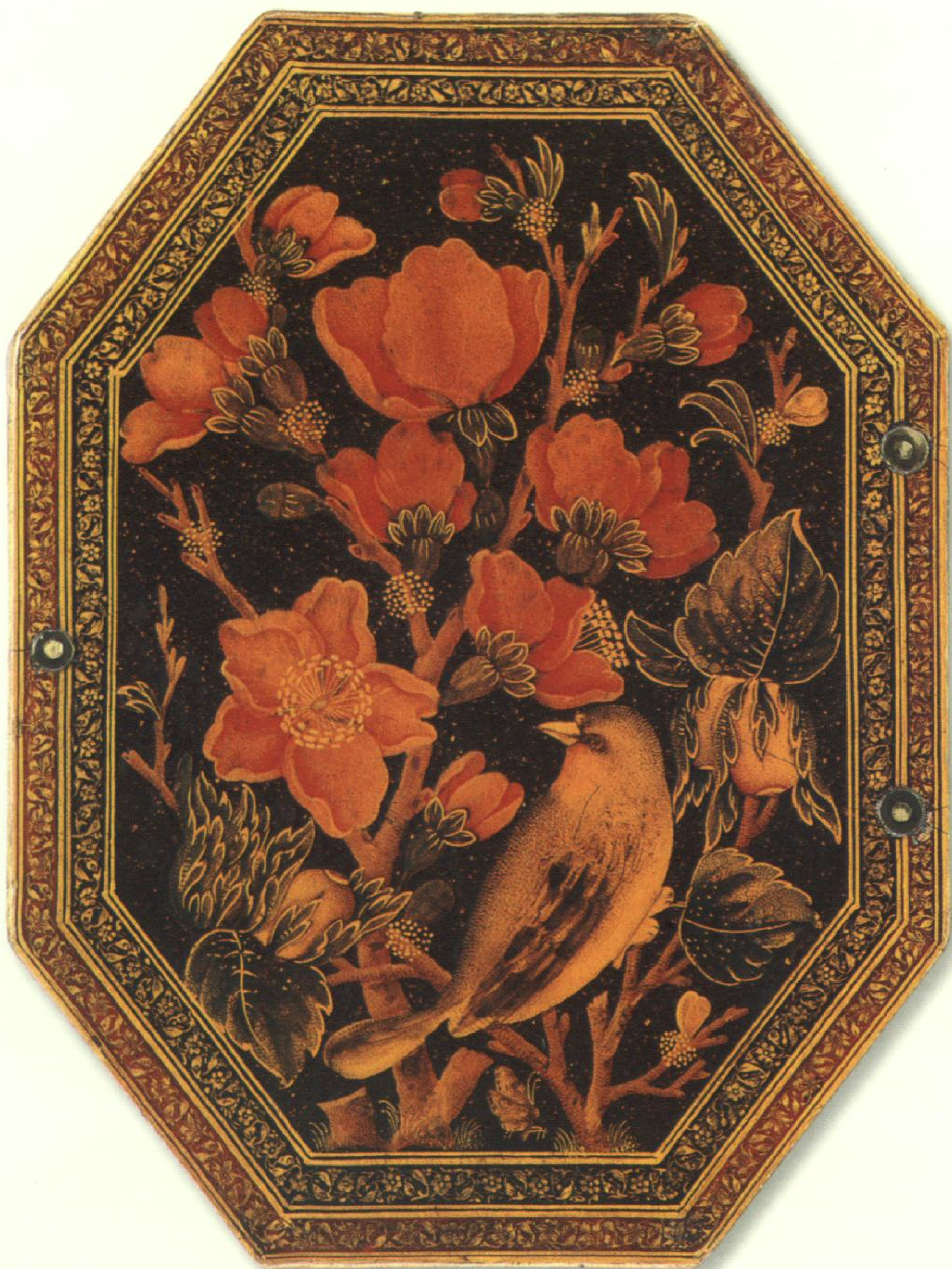








57 top, base and side of cover; side of sliding compartment



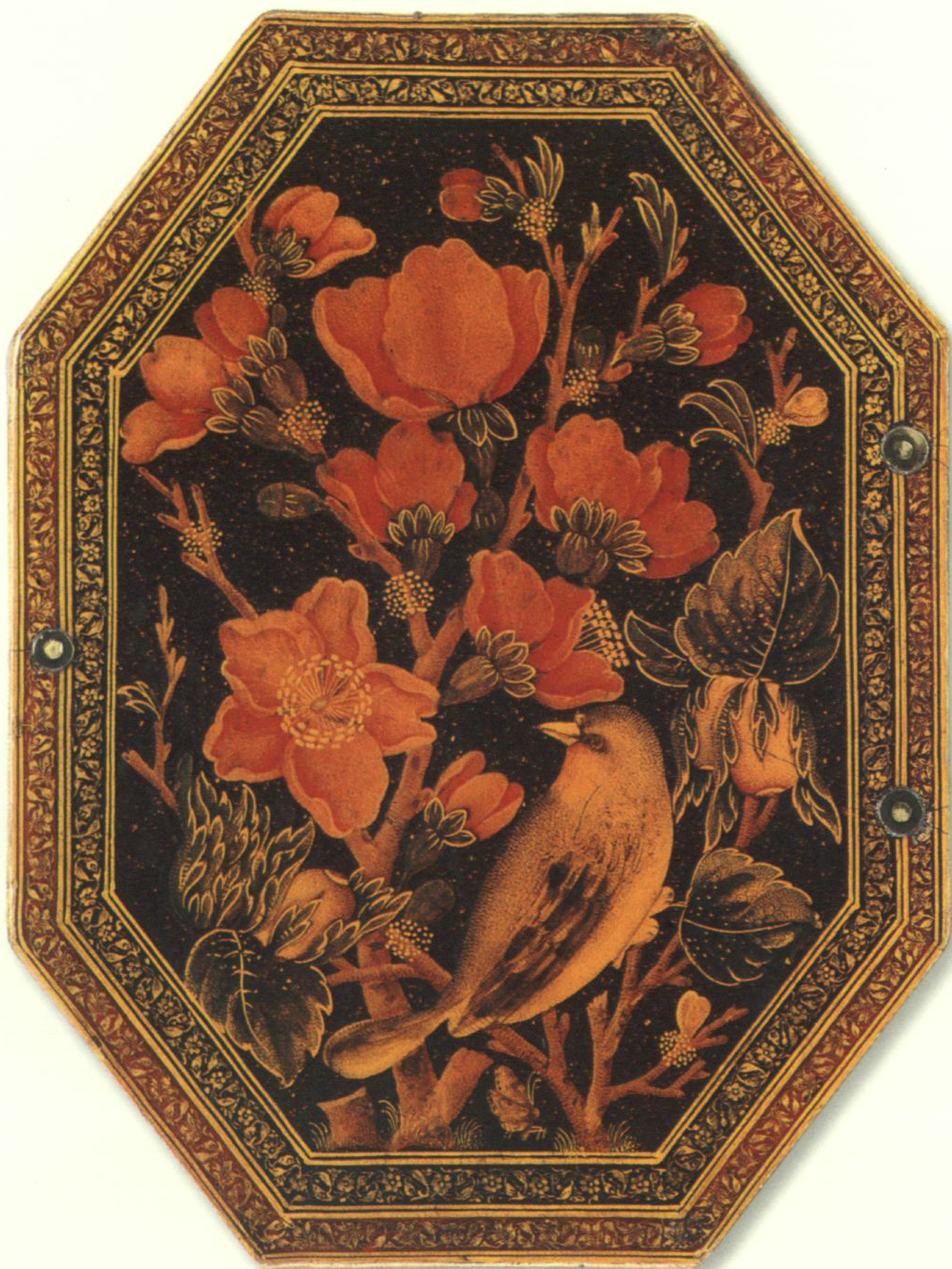
56 back of case



56 front of case with shutter



56 inner face of shutter



56 back of case



56 front of case with shutter



56 inner face of shutter



55 inside







55 top of lid, side, base

54

Pen box

Isfahan, 17th or 18th century

Papier-mâché body and slightly convex hinged lid with straight ends, 27 × 6.2 × 5.6 cm; metal hinges and hasp. The decoration is signed, 'It was completed by the most humble servant Muhammad Zaman.'
accession no. LAQ364

Like cat.21–3 above, the decoration of this pen box belongs to the tradition of flower-and-bird and flower painting current before the emergence of the school of Muhammad Zaman in the late 17th century: the basic difference is that the motifs are juxtaposed in an almost random manner rather than integrated into the sophisticated compositions seen, for example, on cat.26 and cat.62.

The designs on the lid and the sides of the body are set against a sparkling maroon ground. On the lid two birds are perched on two fruit trees that have been reduced to stumps but have burst back into life on the advent of spring; they are in full blossom. The interstices are filled by a row of flowering plants, set on or slightly above the base line, and similar plants fill the sides, where they are visited by the occasional insect. The flowering plants are of the same botanical-study type as on cat.19 and cat.20, but here the leaves are outlined in gold. The base of the box is black, with a lobed medallion and pendants filled with gold floral scrollwork, while the interior is painted green.

The signature is an unusual one for a lacquer pen box and may have been copied from an example of Muhammad Zaman's work on paper. Nevertheless, the pen box is very probably of the later Safavid period.

55

Pen box

Isfahan, *circa* 1700–20

Papier-mâché body and hinged lid with rounded ends, 30 × 6.2 × 5.8 cm; silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ337

The mass of flowers on a black ground that decorates the lid of this pen box is typical of lacquer painting of the 18th century, but the sinuous arrangement, which seems to owe much to the conventional scrollwork of Islamic ornament, is unusual; it may be a token of an early date for this type of composition. The sides are decorated in a very different manner, with a scrolling vine set with red, chrysanthemum-like flowers. The motifs are outlined in gold against a black ground. Similar flowers appear against a gold ground on the inside of the lid. Here the execution is not of the same consistently high quality: the green of the leaves has pooled, for example. A very similar composition can be seen on a pen box signed by Hajji Muhammad and dated Rajab 1092 (July–August 1681).[1] The base of the box has a trailing clematis in sparkling brown, outlined in gold against a red ground.

This pen box was clearly painted by a leading member of the school of Muhammad Zaman. As well as the parallel with the pen box by Muhammad Zaman's brother, Hajji Muhammad, there are also a number of similarities with the work of Muhammad 'Ali ibn Muhammad Zaman (see cat.34). A signed pen box by this artist is of the same unusual shape and size, and has the same type of repeating flower pattern around the sides of the lid.[2] The top of its lid bears a court scene not unrelated in style to that on cat.26, but the naturalistic flower design on the sides is close in character to the principal composition on cat.55. In addition, the base was painted in the same technique – a combination of a red ground, gold outlines and motifs in sparkling *marqash* – as cat.36, which can also be attributed to Muhammad 'Ali with some certainty.

1. Adle 1980, fig.20.
2. Robinson 1985, no.157.

56

Mirror case with shutter

Isfahan, AH 1122 (AD 1710–11)

Octagonal papier-mâché case, 16.3 × 12.4 cm, and hinged shutter, 14.2 × 10.2 cm; silver hinges and hasp. The decoration is inscribed, *Yā Bāqir al-'Ulūm* ('O You who are well-versed in knowledge!')
accession no. LAQ289

The outside of the shutter and the back of the case are finely painted with octagonal panels showing a bird on a rose bush with hazelnuts and butterflies, all against a sparkling dark-brown ground. The leaves are enhanced by gold outlines. The inside of the cover is painted with a large iris flanked by roses on a gold ground.

A number of painters during the 18th century appear to have inscribed their work with the invocation *Yā Bāqir al-'Ulūm*, which refers to the imam Muhammad Baqir, but it is difficult to distinguish between them.[1] Apart from this mirror case, the Khalili Collection contains two pieces from the 1710s and 1720s that may be by the same artist. One, cat.75, is inscribed with the invocation to the imam, while the other, cat.57, was signed by 'the most humble Muhammad Baqir'. No painter of this name active at this period has previously been recorded, but the stylistic similarities in these three pieces, especially in cat.56 and cat.57, suggest that a Muhammad Baqir trained in the school of Muhammad Zaman was already at work by 1710.

1. See p.75 above.

57

Pen box

Isfahan, AH 1127 (AD 1715)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.7 × 4 × 4.2 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Muhammad Baqir.'
accession no. LAQ369

The top and sides of the cover are painted with hazelnuts and small birds on a dark-brown ground. These motifs were executed in a manner remarkably similar to the hazelnuts and birds on cat.56, which was also signed by Muhammad Baqir and dated 1710–11; the gold outlines, though, are lacking. A new feature is the mass of dots and tiny flowers around the centre of the base line, suggesting the flower-studded lawn from which the hazel bushes grow. This became a standard element of 18th- and 19th-century flower-and-bird designs on lacquer.[1] The base of the cover has a finely painted and more varied flower-and-bird composition on gold ground. Work of such quality is unusual on the base of a pen box, and it matches the design on the inside of the shutter on cat.56. The sides of the sliding compartment are black and are filled with trailing grape vines in fruit.

1. This is especially true for some Shirazi work; see below, cat.152–4, for example.





54 top of lid, base





53 back of case



53 inner face of shutter

52

Binding of a devotional miscellany
Iran, mid-18th century

Papier-mâché boards, each
20.6 × 12.8 cm, and a red leather spine
accession no. MSS402

The text block to which this binding is attached is composed of three separate manuscripts bound together, although there are only 33 leaves in total. The first section was copied by 'Ala' al-Din Tabrizi in AH 984 (AD 1576–7), the second is not signed, and the third was completed by Ahmad al-Nayrizi in AH 1118 (AD 1706–7).[1]

The binding is later and was painted in the style of 'Ali Ashraf. On each cover a dark-green field with massed flowers surrounds a lobed medallion and pendants, containing more flowers on a crimson ground. The floral frame also has a crimson ground. The doublures are red with a fine scattering of gold and are bordered by a narrower floral frame with a black ground.

The covers were originally signed at the top of the two central medallions, but in both cases the signature has been obliterated. The damage reveals that the brightness of the crimson ground was achieved by a method similar to the foiling of precious stones, that is, by applying a layer of gold leaf under the red varnish.[2]

1. For further examples of work by these calligraphers in the Khalili Collection, see Safwat 1996.
2. For a discussion of this technique, see Part Two, 'The lacquer pen box'.

53

Mirror case with shutter
Iran, perhaps 18th and 19th century

Rectangular papier-mâché case,
26.7 × 17.5 cm, and fitted shutter,
24.6 × 15.5 cm
accession no. LAQ165
published Sotheby's, 1 June 1987,
lot no.51

The back of the case and the outside of the shutter are decorated in the style of 'Ali Ashraf: the lobed medallions and pendants in the centre, as well as the corner-pieces, have a black ground and are filled with flowers. Similar flowers also fill the sparkling red field between them. This work may be 18th-century in date, but the inside of the shutter shows a portrait of the Imam 'Ali in the manner of the later 19th century. The imam is shown seated and holds his sword, Dhu'l-Faqar, across his knees.



52 upper cover

49

Pen box

Isfahan, AH 1153 (AD 1740–41)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.1 × 3.8 × 3.5 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast* ('After Muhammad 'Ali is the most noble.')
accession no. LAQ415

The top and sides of the cover have a sparkling dark-brown ground, the only decoration being the narrow gold edges and the inscription, in gold *nasta'līq*. The base of the cover is red, and the sliding compartment dark-red.

50

Pen box

Iran, second half of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 26.4 × 4.9 × 4.8 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of the maker Taraj; the decoration is unsigned.
accession no. LAQ309

The top and sides of the cover have the same plain, sparkling dark-brown ground and narrow gold edging as cat. 49. However, like cat. 46, this pen box can be dated to the 19th rather than the 18th century on the basis of the maker's seal.[1]

1. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.

51

Box

Isfahan, AH 1160 (AD 1747–8)

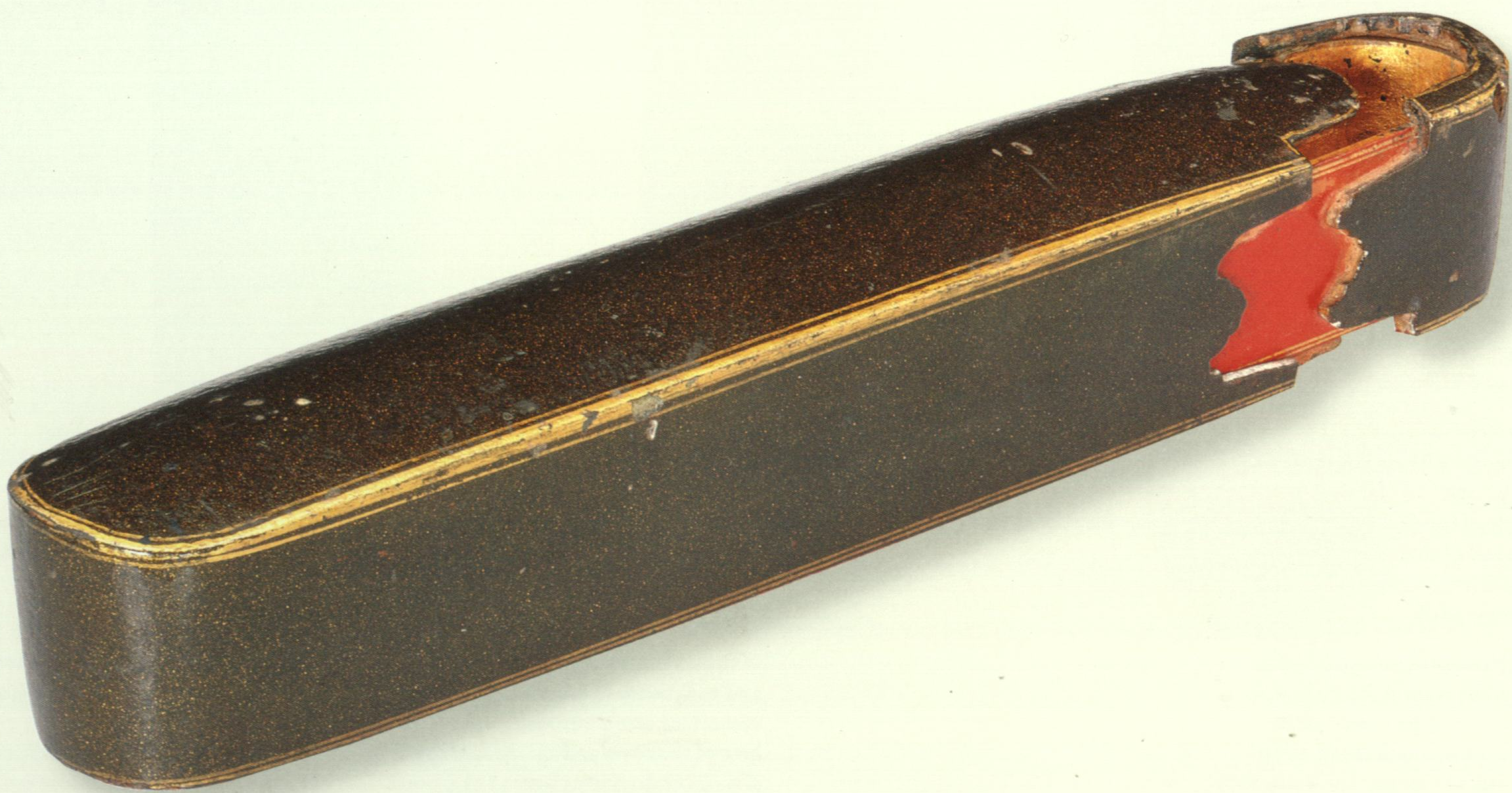
Papier-mâché body and lid of shallow circular form, 8.5 cm in diameter and 1.8 cm deep.
The decoration is inscribed, *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast* ('After Muhammad 'Ali is the most noble.')
accession no. LAQ313

The top and base of this exquisite box have a radiating floral design with gold tendrils. The design is set against a sparkling red ground and is enclosed by a double frame.



51 top, actual size





9, 50







46, 47, 48

46

Pen box
Iran, second half of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22 × 4 × 3.7 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of the maker, Taraj; the decoration is unsigned.
accession no. LAQ7

Although this unsigned pen box is painted in the style of 'Ali Ashraf, it can be dated to the second half of the 19th century on the basis of the maker's seal, for Taraj is known to have flourished in the reign of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar (*reg.* 1848–1896).[1]

The top and sides of the cover have a dark maroon ground and are exquisitely decorated with symmetrical designs of small flowers with gold tendrils. The floral design on the top surrounds three lobed medallions that show birds perched on blossoming trees against a translucent green background. There is a smaller medallion of gold scrollwork at either end. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold scrollwork on a red ground.

1. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.

47

Pen box
Iran, third quarter of the 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23 × 3.8 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ397

In this variation of the style associated with 'Ali Ashraf, the top and sides of the cover are decorated with a design of massed flowers on a black ground and a sequence of lobed medallions containing miniature landscapes. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have a red ground decorated with floral scrolls in gold.

48

Pen box
Iran, 19th century

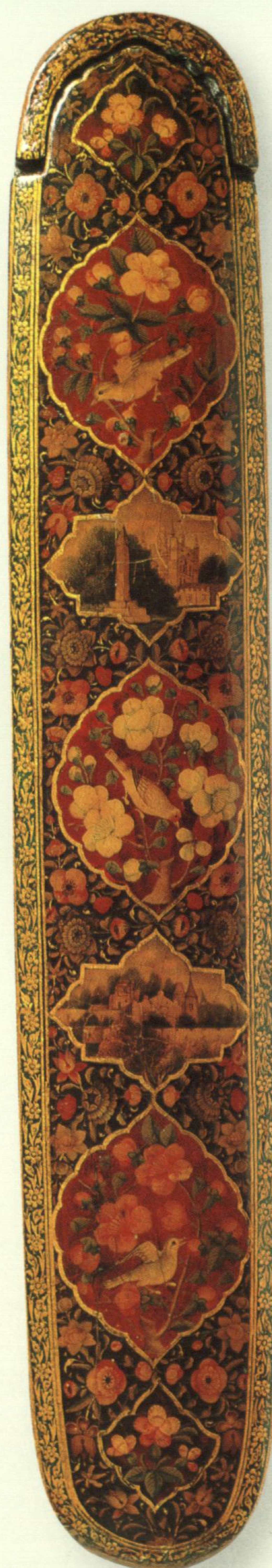
Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.1 × 4.1 × 4.1 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of the maker, 'Ali; the decoration is unsigned.
accession no. LAQ221

Like cat. 46, this pen box is datable to the 19th century on the basis of the seal of the maker.[1]

The top and sides of the cover have a black ground that bears a close-set floral design. On the top, three dark-red medallions of birds and flowers alternate with small landscapes. Two similar landscape medallions appear on either side. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, decorated with gold floral scrolls.

1. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.





46, 47, 48





43, 44, 45

43
Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1160 (AD 1747–8)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.2 × 4 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf ast* ('After Muhammad 'Ali is the most noble.')
accession no. LAQ224

The familiar design of flowers on a brown ground is set, on the top of the cover, with lobed medallions and pendants, outlined in gold, which contain more flowers and birds. The decoration of the sides is similar, while the base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment show fine gold scrollwork on black (the base) or red (the sides). The signature and date occur in the two outermost pendants on the top of the cover.

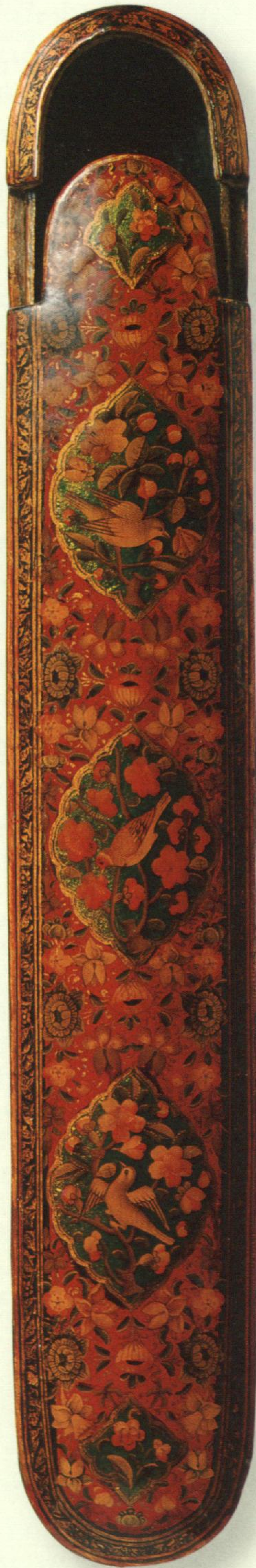
44
Pen box
Iran, mid-18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 21.8 × 3.8 × 3.8 cm
accession no. LAQ222

This pen box is decorated in the style of 'Ali Ashraf (compare cat. 43). The top and sides of the cover have a red ground, filled with a close-set design of flowers with gold tendrils. The top is set with three lobed medallions and a pendant at each end. All have sparkling green grounds and are painted with birds and flowers. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are black and are decorated with gold floral scrolls.

45
Pen box
Iran, mid-18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22.1 × 3.9 × 3.8 cm
accession no. LAQ322
On the top of this pen box, which is painted in the style of 'Ali Ashraf, there are massed flowers on a dark-red ground and black medallions and pendants containing birds and flowers. The sides display a variation on the same composition. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are dark maroon and are decorated with gold floral scrolls.


43, 44, 45

('Sadiq is [a painter] by the grace of 'Ali Ashraf').[22]

Sadiq's movements during his lifetime are known in rough outline. He can be presumed to have trained in Isfahan, where he would have worked on the St Petersburg album E–14, and he later spent some time in Shiraz, where he worked for Muhammad Karim Khan Zand (*reg.* 1750–1779). The primary evidence for this is the appearance of the inscription, 'O You who are true to Your promise!', on two oil-paintings in a pavilion in the city that was built by Karim Khan.[23] Other evidence may be inferred from the appearance of princely types wearing the high Zand turban in some of his lacquer wares; an example is a mirror case of AH 1189 (AD 1775–6) in the Victoria and Albert Museum, with a Zand prince shown hunting with his entourage on one face and with his harem on another.[24]

Eventually, however, Sadiq returned to Isfahan: his presence there is substantiated by the inscriptions on an oil-painting in the Chihil Sutun palace in the city. The painting depicts Nadir Shah's victory over the Mughals at Karnal in 1738, and it was previously thought, rather improbably, that the artist had executed it for Nadir Shah before he went to Shiraz, as reported by Charles Texier in the 19th century.[25] The inscriptions show that this was not so, for, in addition to the invocation, 'O You who are true to Your promise!', they consist of two couplets, 'In obedience to the command of the Emperor of the Age, who is equal to Faridun in glory, Muhammad Khan Qajar, the sign and glory of Nadir Shah Afshar were renewed by the brush of Sadiq Naqqash.'[26] Thus the painter was commissioned to work on the *Battle of Karnal* not by Nadir Shah but by Agha Muhammad, the first ruler of the Qajar dynasty, who died in 1797.[27]

Sadiq's output as a lacquer-painter seems to have had figural decoration as its principal theme. A fine example of his work in this mode is cat.96 below, a pen box signed with the invocation *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* and the date AH 1193 (AD 1779–80). The top of the cover is painted with *Visit to a sage*, a theme that can be traced back to the work of Muhammad Zaman (see below, p.134). Another, signed in the same manner and dated a year later, in AH 1194 (AD 1780), displays very much the same scene, but reversed.[28] Such a progression suggests that pen boxes with this design were being produced by Sadiq on a regular basis, presumably for the market. This appears to prefigure the methods of the 19th-century painters of Isfahan who specialized in bookbinder's lacquer, such as Najaf 'Ali, and, as cat.98 shows, the style of figure painting practised by Isfahani masters of the early 19th century also seems to be dependent on the forms developed by Sadiq.

Muhammad Baqir

The life and work of 'Ali Ashraf's pupil Muhammad Baqir are not as well-known as those of Muhammad Sadiq,[29] but there are several parallels between the two younger painters, not least in the way that they signed their work. Some of Baqir's output is signed in a standard manner ('Painted by the most humble Muhammad Baqir', for example), but he also employed the crypto-signatures *Yā Bāqir al-'Ulūm* ('O you who are well-versed in knowledge!') and *Bāqir az ba'd-i 'Alī ashraf būd* ('Baqir was most noble after 'Ali'). Both may be interpreted as referring to the fifth Shi'i imam, Muhammad Baqir, after whom the painter was named, while the second clearly belongs to the same 'family' of signatures as *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast* and *Ṣādiq az luṭf-i 'Alī ashraf shud.* Only two examples of this second crypto-signature are known, and both are in the St Petersburg album,[30] while Karimzadeh listed eight examples of lacquer signed with the invocation, 'O You who are well-versed in knowledge!'[31] All are decorated entirely or predominantly with flower-and-bird compositions, and five bear dates between AH 1160 (AD 1747) and AH 1195 (AD 1781).[32] However, two items of this type in the Khalili Collection bear much earlier dates: cat.56 is dated AH 1122 (AD 1710–11) and cat.75, AH 1141 (AD 1728–9). It is therefore tempting to propose the existence of a 'Baqir I' who flourished in the first decades of the 18th century, but as in the case of 'Sadiq I' there is no independent evidence to support such a hypothesis.

Naqqash-bashi Afshar of Urumiyyah, I'timad al-Saltanah mentioned that Abu'l-Hasan's paternal uncle was a painter called 'Ali Ashraf Naqqash Afshar, whom Yahya Zoka', and following him Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh, identified with the artist who employed the inscription *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast.*[19] But it seems unlikely that Abu'l-Hasan, who was still at work in the 1880s, would have had an uncle who flourished between the first quarter of the 18th century and about 1760.

Against the identification of 'Ali Ashraf and Muhammad 'Ali is the existence of works such as cat.63 and cat.65 that are signed, 'painted by the most humble 'Ali Ashraf'. Consequently, we must accept for the present that Muhammad 'Ali Naqqash-bashi had a contemporary called 'Ali Ashraf, who specialized in the decoration of bookbinder's lacquer.

'Ali Ashraf's stylistic relationship with the other three painters proposed as his master is self-evident, although, as Muhammad Zaman seems to have died before 1700,[20] the candidacies of Muhammad 'Ali and Hajji Muhammad are stronger. The last known work of Muhammad 'Ali is a depiction of the Nawruz reception of Shah Sultan Husayn in the spring of 1721 (see cat.34), while the last known dated work of Hajji Muhammad, cat.26 above, was made in 1712–13. It is therefore difficult to judge who has the better claim to have been 'Ali Ashraf's master.

As noted above, 'Ali Ashraf is celebrated for the production of bookbinder's lacquer decorated with fine flower and flower-and-bird designs. He is particularly associated with a type of composition in which a variety of figural, landscape and flower-and-bird motifs contained within medallions were set on a floral background with a formal structure. However, on the larger pieces by him in the Khalili Collection, the mirror cases cat.64 and cat.65 and the binding cat.63, these compositions are confined to internal surfaces – the inside of the shutter of the two mirrors and the doublures of the binding – and the external surfaces are decorated with unitary flower-and-bird compositions. On cat.62, too, subtle combinations of flower studies are displayed in unitary fields; all the motifs in a composition rise from the same base line, and there is no underlying scrollwork structure. By contrast, cat.51 shows the painter using a symmetrical scroll pattern set with stylized flowers, and on cat.49 he confined the decoration of the main surfaces to a brown *marqash* ground and gold edges. It seems clear from the examples of his work in the Khalili Collection that 'Ali Ashraf was more inventive than he is often given credit for, and his lead was followed by later painters, who reproduced not only his floral and flower-and-bird compositions but also his more unusual work, as in the case of cat.50.

Muhammad Sadiq

'Ali Ashraf's most celebrated pupil was Muhammad Sadiq. He produced works on paper, in oils, and on bookbinder's lacquer, and many are signed, some in a standard manner ('Painted by the most humble Muhammad Sadiq'), but many with the invocation *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!'), which is generally accepted as a crypto-signature of the artist. That this is so is indicated by an important work that, as we shall see, bears both types of signature. A third signature, *Ṣādiq az luṭf-i 'Alī ashraf shud* ('Sadiq became most noble by the grace of 'Ali'), appears on a number of lacquer wares cited by Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi, which are dated between AH 1128 (AD 1716) and AH 1177 (AD 1763–4). Some of these dates are impossibly early for the famous Muhammad Sadiq, who flourished under Karim Khan Zand and the earlier Qajars, and so Karimzadeh proposed the existence of two Muhammad Sadiqs, one active from 1716 to 1764, the other from 1747 to 1796,[21] but there is no independent evidence for the existence of 'Sadiq I'. The inscription *Ṣādiq az luṭf-i 'Alī ashraf shud* is clearly related in its wording to the crypto-signature, *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast*, and it too can be interpreted both as a simple pious sentiment – that the sixth imam Ja'far al-Sadiq 'became most noble' through the grace of his ancestor, the Imam 'Ali – and as a declaration of allegiance to his master

independent master some time in the first two decades of the 18th century, that he was certainly active by the late 1730s, and that he died *circa* 1760. On this basis, then, we may consider which of the four masters named above trained 'Ali Ashraf.

Muhammad 'Ali Naqqash-bashi was a poet as well as a painter, and as a consequence entries on him were included in biographical dictionaries of poets compiled in the later 18th century. One, the *Ātashkadah*, was written by a personal friend, Lutf 'Ali Beg Azar Begdili, who related that Muhammad 'Ali Beg was the son of Abdal Beg Naqqash-bashi and the grandson of the painter, 'Aliquli Beg Farangi ('the Frank'), 'who was ennobled by conversion to Islam in the days of the Safavid sultans and was employed on royal commissions' (see cat.28). Muhammad 'Ali grew to maturity in Isfahan and was *naqqāsh-bāshī* ('head painter') under Shah Tahmasp II Safavi (*reg.* 1722–1732) and Nadir Shah (*reg.* 1736–1747).



64 inner face of shutter and front of case, showing the original 18th-century silvered glass mirror, of European manufacture

Eventually his sight deteriorated, and he died in Mazandaran in AH 1172 (AD 1758–9).[16] Muhammad 'Ali Naqqash-bashi worked in the tradition established by his grandfather and Muhammad Zaman,[17] but no examples of bookbinder's lacquer painted by him, nor any flower or flower-and-bird studies on paper, have been identified, and as lacquer painted with floral and flower-and-bird themes was the mainstay of 'Ali Ashraf's production, the artistic relationship between the two is difficult to substantiate. What is more, Muhammad 'Ali and 'Ali Ashraf flourished in the same period and died at about the same time, and it therefore seems unlikely that one was the teacher of the other.[18]

In fact, the complementary nature of their work – figural studies on paper and manuscript illustrations signed Muhammad 'Ali, and bookbinder's lacquer with predominantly floral decoration signed *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast*, all produced in the mid-18th century – tempts one to conclude that Muhammad 'Ali and 'Ali Ashraf were the same person. If this were so, the appearance of the painter 'Ali Ashraf in the specialist literature could be accounted for by a misreading of the inscription *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast* under the influence of a passage in the *Āthār wa'l-ma'āthir*, completed by Muhammad Hasan Khan I'timad al-Saltanah in 1886–7. In his account of the Tabrizi painter Abu'l-Hasan

The 18th-century tradition

The continued predominance of the school of Muhammad Zaman in the decoration of bookbinder's lacquer in the 18th century is well-illustrated by the Khalili Collection. Many of its holdings from this period were signed by a small number of celebrated artists, who played a key role in transmitting this painting tradition to the masters of the early Qajar period. This group, which includes 'Ali Ashraf, Muhammad Sadiq and Muhammad Baqir, was connected by a series of master–pupil relationships to the founders of the school, namely Muhammad Zaman and his brother or brothers and 'Aliquli Jabadar. However, although the stylistic continuity is clear, work on tracing the relationships between particular masters is at an early stage, and even the identity of individual artists may be called into question.

The St Petersburg album

Apart from 'Ali Ashraf, whose output appears to have been confined to bookbinder's lacquer, the school of Muhammad Zaman produced works in a variety of media, ranging from drawings to enamels. On occasion members of the school worked together on albums of paintings and calligraphy. One particularly grand example, album E–14 in the State Hermitage in St Petersburg, has been published in full;[1] its history is relatively well-known;[2] and the artists employed in compiling it often included signatures and dates in their designs. It therefore provides us with a useful point of reference when considering less well-documented evidence.[3] This is particularly important as the textual sources for the history of painting in this period are very meagre, and the signatures and dates on bookbinder's lacquer and other works are not always reliable.[4]

The calligraphy in the St Petersburg album consists entirely of pieces in the *nasta'līq* script by 'Imad al-Hasani (d. 1615). The paintings are mostly Indian works of the late 16th to early 18th centuries, probably acquired as booty during Nadir Shah Afshar's Indian campaign of 1738–9, but they also include items produced in Isfahan in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The elements that concern us date from the mid-18th century and consist of the binding and of the illuminated frames and borders on each page. The binding is inscribed with verses commemorating an event in AH 1147 (AD 1734–5) but was completed four years later:[5] the exterior was signed and dated twice, once in AH 1150 (AD 1737–8) with the the deliberately ambiguous signature of 'Ali Ashraf, and once in AH 1151 (AD 1738–9) by Muhammad Hadi, who also signed much of the illumination between AH 1160 (AD 1747) and AH 1172 (AD 1758–9).[6] In fact, 'Ali Ashraf may have had a coordinating role in the compilation of the album, as he appears to have trained Muhammad Hadi (see cat. 108 and p. 144 below) and the other two illuminators involved in the project, Muhammad Sadiq and Muhammad Baqir.

'Ali Ashraf

On one level the inscription 'Ali Ashraf placed on the binding of the St Petersburg album, *Zi ba'd-i Muḥammad 'Alī ashraf-ast*, can be read as a declaration of religious allegiance, 'After Muhammad, 'Ali is most noble'. On a second level, it has been interpreted as a reverence to the master who trained the painter, 'After Muhammad there is 'Ali Ashraf', or perhaps 'After Muhammad 'Ali there is ['Ali] Ashraf'. The identity of 'Ali Ashraf's master is not clear, and at least four candidates for the role have been proposed. One is Muhammad 'Ali Naqqash-bashi;[7] the second is Muhammad Zaman;[8] the third is Muhammad Zaman's son, Muhammad 'Ali;[9] and the fourth is Muhammad Zaman's brother, Hajji Muhammad.[10]

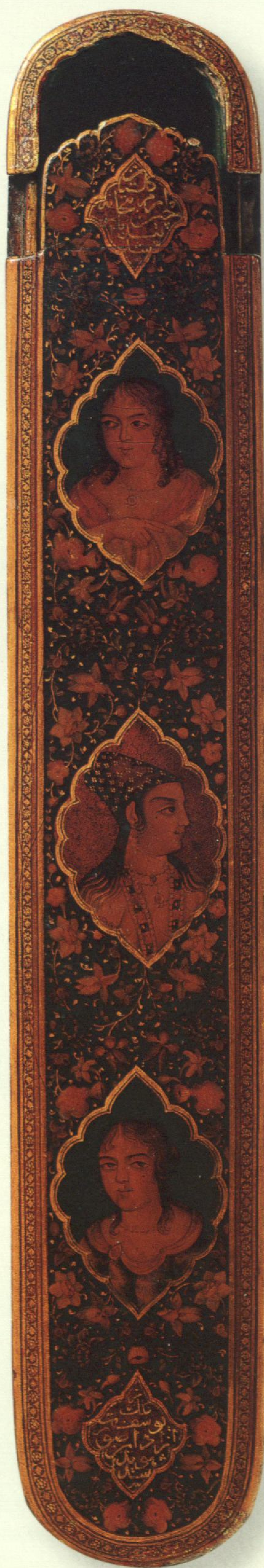
'Ali Ashraf's floruit has been given variously as 1718–60,[11] 1723–60,[12] 1727–57,[13] and from the early 1700s to the 1780s,[14] but his artistic activity is well-attested only from the 1730s onwards.[15] Works by him from the 1740s and 1750s are comprehensively represented in the holdings of the Khalili Collection: it contains seven signed and dated pieces which were produced between AH 1152 (AD 1739) and AH 1168 (AD 1754–5) (cat. 43, 49, 51, 62–5). The tentative conclusions to be drawn from this are that 'Ali Ashraf began to work as an













37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42

37

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1116 (AD 1704–5)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 21.5 × 3.8 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'He! Painted by the most humble Hajji Muhammad.'
accession no. LAQ297
published Adle 1980, pp.48–9

The top of the cover displays a vertical composition of five lobed medallions: the central medallion contains a girl's head, those above and below have birds and flowers, and the two at the top and bottom are inscribed with the signature and the date. The medallions are surrounded by a floral design against a ground of dark-red lacquer, and the same pattern appears on the sides. Under the lacquer the surface has been wrapped with flattened wire, apparently an experiment in creating a richer effect.

The base of the cover is finely painted with a floral scroll and two flowering plants, rendered in dark red and black and outlined in gold. The sides of the sliding compartment are dark brown, with plain, gold-outlined lobed panels.

This is one of ten items identified by Chahryar Adle as the work of Hajji Muhammad (another is cat.26 above). The use of flattened wire under the lacquer decoration seems not to have found favour, but the design Hajji Muhammad developed in this instance stands at the beginning of a tradition that continued for a century, as cat.38–42 show. The format of a series of lobed medallions on a floral ground was taken up by 'Ali Ashraf, with whom it is generally associated.

38

Pen box
Isfahan, first half of the 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.5 × 4.5 × 3.7 cm.
The decoration is signed in verse, 'The rose-garden of Iram and the temple of China have again been made manifest; these designs have made their appearance through the brushwork of Yusuf Azad.'
accession no. LAQ8

The flat top of the cover has an overall design of small flowers with gold stems on a black ground and lobed medallions and pendants containing bust portraits of three young women and the two parts of a signature in verse. The young woman portrayed in the central medallion is Indian, while the other two are European.

The sides of the cover carry a continuous design of sprays of various flowers on a black ground, while the base has gold floral scrollwork on a red ground. Panels with similar scrollwork, also in gold on a red ground, separated by quatrefoils painted with small flowers, decorate the sides of the sliding compartment.

Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi recorded this painter on the basis of the signature on cat.38, and failed to note any connection with Muhammad Yusuf ibn Muhammad Zaman (*fl.* 1705–20).[1] The name Yusuf Azad presumably belonged to a Muhammad Yusuf whose pen-name was Azad, and, as this pen box probably dates from the first half of the 18th century and is decorated in the style of the followers of Muhammad Zaman, Yusuf Azad and the Muhammad Yusuf who was the son of Muhammad Zaman may have been the same person.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, p.1431, no.1446. For Muhammad Yusuf ibn Muhammad Zaman, see pp.1115–16, no.1175.

39

Pen box
Isfahan, first half of the 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.7 × 4.2 × 4 cm
accession no. LAQ437

The top of the cover bears three lobed medallions with small panels of *nasta'līq* inscriptions between them and a pendant at each end. The central medallion contains the bust portrait of a young woman, and the outer two are filled with floral scrolls. The medallions are set against a sparkling orange ground decorated with conventional floral scrollwork in gold. The same appears on the sides, together with four small lobed medallions of flowers on a black ground.

The base of the cover is sparkling crimson, with floral motifs in gold, and the sides of the sliding compartment are red, with gold floral scrollwork.

This work resembles cat.38 and cat.40, and it, too, may be the work of Yusuf Azad. But there is also a strong parallel with a pen box in St Petersburg which is signed by Muhammad Ibrahim, the brother of Muhammad Zaman.[1]

The quatrain on this piece again makes direct reference to the decoration of the object, 'How can one close one's eyes to this pen box? It is a design of a type that ... to be seen. Within the field of vision of its eye, the inkwell, which narcissus bloom can it pick with each of its pens?'

1. Ivanov 1970; Adle 1980, pp.37–42.

40

Pen box
Isfahan, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23 × 4 × 3.7 cm
accession no. LAQ9

The top of the cover is painted with a mass of small flowers with gold stems, symmetrically arranged in the manner of 'Ali Ashraf on a ground of translucent crimson. This design surrounds three lobed medallions, each containing the head of a young woman, one Indian and two Iranian, and two pendants painted with small landscapes.

The sides are decorated with a succession of flowering plants set at regular intervals; they comprise roses, irises, narcissi and other standard types. The base of the cover is covered with floral scrollwork on black, and the sides of the sliding compartment have gold flowering plants on red.

The decoration is very similar to that of cat.38, which was signed by Yusuf Azad.

41

Pen box
Isfahan, Rajab 1212
(December 1797–January 1798)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.4 × 4.3 × 4 cm.
The inside of the cover is set with the seal of the maker Muhammad Hashim al-Musawi, which is dated AH 1203 (AD 1788–9); the decoration is inscribed, *Yā Ṣādiq al-Wa'd* ('O You who are true to Your promise!')
accession no. LAQ223

The top of the cover has a red ground with a close-set floral design, surrounding three lobed medallions and two pendants. The medallions contain bust portraits of two girls and a youth, while the pendants contain the cryptosignature of Muhammad Sadiq, the pupil of 'Ali Ashraf.[1] The sides are decorated with a series of flowering plants and butterflies on a black ground. The base of the cover and sides of the sliding compartment are red with two different types of floral scrolls in gold.

The maker's seal on the inside of the cover is particularly interesting, since it is the earliest recorded to date. The oval seal was applied to the inside of the cover while the papier-mâché was still damp.[2]

1. See pp.72–7.
2. See Part Two, 'Maker's seals'.

42

Pen box
Iran, AH 1225 (AD 1810–11)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 4.2 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Rahim Dakani'
accession no. LAQ15

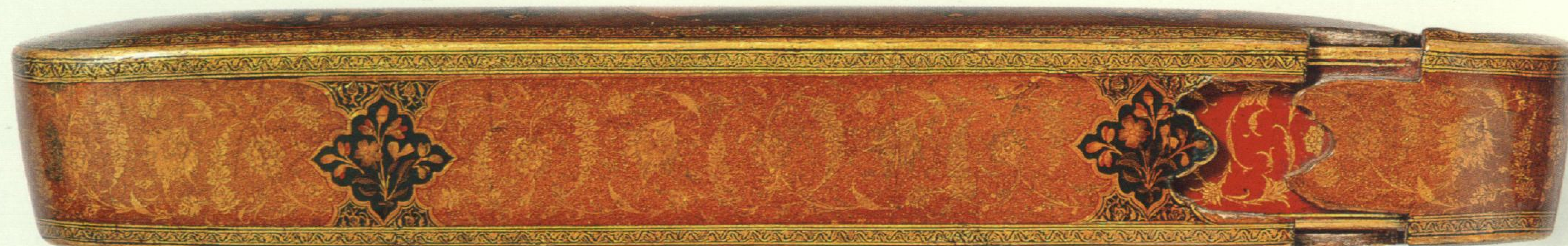
The top of the cover has a crimson ground with an overall design of small flowers with gold stems, in the manner of 'Ali Ashraf; three scalloped medallions contain the heads of a young European man in a blue uniform jacket with gold epaulettes, a European girl in a red ermine-trimmed dress, and a second European girl holding a small cup. At the ends are two pendants containing tiny landscapes.

The sides of the cover have a continuous design of roses and other flowers on a black ground; the base displays hyacinth and narcissus plants on a crimson-red ground. The sides of the sliding compartment have crimson-red panels of various flowers between floral borders.

It is clear that the Rahim Dakani who signed cat.42 in AH 1225 (AD 1810–11) cannot have been the same person as the painter of this name who flourished *circa* 1706–7.[1] In addition to cat.42, Karimzadeh Tabrizi recorded another work, a self-portrait dated 15 Rabi' II 1224 (30 May 1809), and suggested that he was the brother of Hasan Dakani, who signed a watercolour dated AH 1231 (AD 1815–16).[2] As the earlier Rahim Dakani was reputed to have settled in Iran, it may be that the later Rahim Dakani and Hasan Dakani were his descendants.

1. See below, pp.234–5, and cat.197.
2. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.153, no.275; p.184, no.377.








37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42







34, 35, 36

34

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1132 (AD 1719–20)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.5 × 4.4 × 4 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the son of Muhammad Zaman, Muhammad 'Ali.'
accession no. LAQ373

The finely painted composition on the top of the cover shows a rather forlorn-looking young girl wearing a frogged robe of gold brocade and carrying a walking stick. She stands in a landscape, with a stream and a culvert in the foreground and a bridge and trees behind. On the sides there are sprays of roses and carnations on a sparkling black ground, while the base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are painted with gold vine scrolls on red.

Muhammad 'Ali was the son of the celebrated Muhammad Zaman and continued the artistic tradition established by his father. His earliest recorded work is a pen box in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, dated AH 1112 (AD 1700–1),[1] and other pen boxes by him include one dated AH 1119 (AD 1707–8),[2] another dated AH 1130 (AD 1718),[3] cat.34, which is dated AH 1132 (AD 1719–20), and cat.35 below, which is dated AH 1133 (AD 1720–21). Muhammad 'Ali's most famous work is the *Distribution of Nawruz gifts by Shah Sultan Husayn*, which can be dated to March 1721.[4]

1. Inv.no.VP–126; Ivanov 1970, p.231, n.6; Adle 1980, n.156, on pp.60–61.
2. Adle 1980, n.156.
3. Robinson 1985, no.157.
4. London, British Museum, inv.no.1920 9–17 0299; Robinson 1967, no.88; Hillenbrand 1977, no.107; Adle 1980, p.60; Diba 1989a, fig.1.

35

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1133 (AD 1720–21)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.3 × 4.3 × 4.4 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the son of Muhammad Zaman, Muhammad 'Ali.'
accession no. LAQ374

On the top of the cover a young couple are shown seated together on a platform under a tree. The composition is disposed vertically, with a stream with ducks in the foreground and buildings and trees behind. The sides display sprays of roses, primroses and carnations on a sparkling black ground. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment bear vine scrolls in gold on a red ground.

36

Pen box
Isfahan, early 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.7 × 4.5 × 3.9 cm.
The decoration is signed, '… Zaman'
accession no. LAQ5

A scene from the tale of Shaykh San'an is depicted on the top of the cover, while the sides are decorated with flowers and birds on a black ground. The dark red base has a flower-and-bird design rendered in a sparkling reddish-brown and outlined in gold. The sides of the sliding compartment are red, with gold floral scrolls.

In the signature only the word *zamān* can now be read, but an attribution to Muhammad 'Ali ibn Muhammad Zaman can be made on the basis of a similar piece which, like cat.35, is dated AH 1133 (AD 1720–21).[1]

1. Drouot Rive Gauche, Salle 4, 27 October 1977, lot no.5.





34, 35, 36





32, 33

32

Pen box
Isfahan, 18th century

Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with straight ends, 30 × 7.2 × 5.9 cm. The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the most humble Muhammad Rabi'.'
accession no. LAQ275

The vertical composition on the top of the box shows a landscape with two Indian female bathers, one of them dressed. The panels on the sides contain landscapes set with buildings, which are separated by four oval bust portraits, two of girls and two of youths. The interior is black and the red base has floral scrolls painted in gold.

Muhammad Rabi' is known only from his signature on this pen box, the character of which suggests that he worked in Isfahan in the 18th century and was associated with the school of Muhammad Zaman ibn Hajji Yusuf. According to Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh, Muhammad Rabi' was of Indian origin, although no evidence was cited for this claim.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.717, no.1021.

33

Pen box
Isfahan, late 17th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24.5 × 4.4 × 4.2 cm.
The decoration is inscribed, *Huwa. Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('He! O Lord of the Age!')
accession no. LAQ497

The top of the cover is decorated with a scene in vertical format, showing huntsmen of different nationalities (Indian, Iranian and, in the background, European) in a wooded landscape with buildings in the distance. The sides bear panels containing European-inspired landscapes, one of which has a large building of vaguely Gothic appearance, and these are divided by small oval bust portraits of youths and girls. Bands of gold scrollwork on a black ground run round the sides, top and bottom, and these seem to have been repainted after the damaged edges of the box were repaired. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment have very fine floral arabesques in gold on a red ground.

As in the case of cat.28, the painting on this pen box is of exceptional quality, and the invocation to the Twelfth Imam with which it was signed indicates that it is the work of Muhammad Zaman, who is credited with inventing this type of crypto-signature. Similar hunting scenes appear on other works by him, including a lacquer 'tondo' that may have been the top of a box.[1]

The date beneath the invocation, '111', can be interpreted as AH 1101 (AD 1689–90) or AH 1110 (AD 1698–9).

1. Zoka' 1354a, fig.17; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pl.65.





32, 33

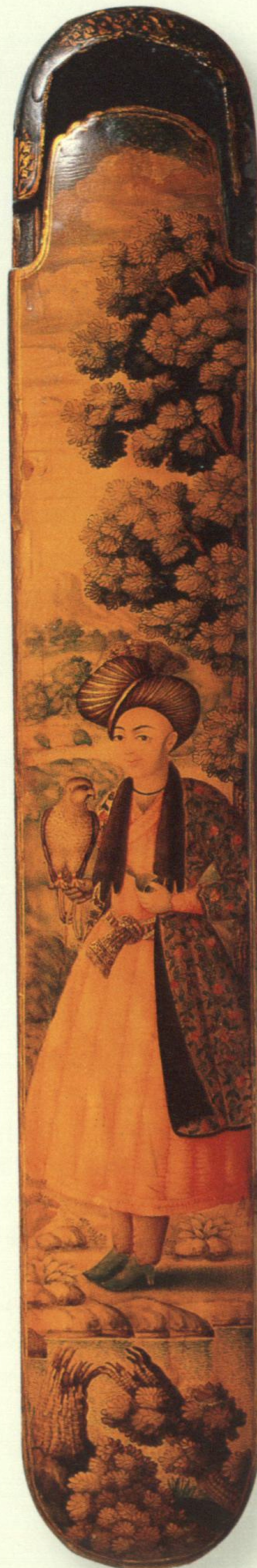
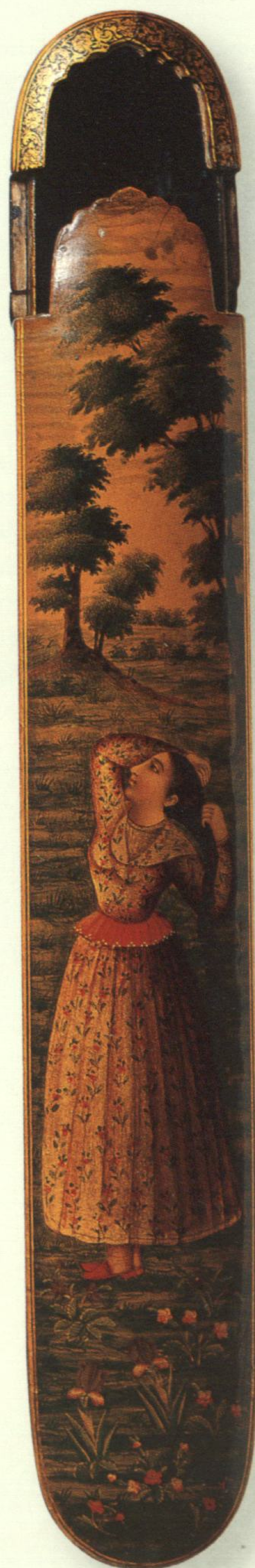










28, 29, 30, 31 covers and sides

27

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1124 (AD 1712–13) or AH 1129 (AD 1716–17)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25 × 4.7 × 4.5 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Muhammad Qasim'
accession no. LAQ144

The horizontally disposed composition on the top of the cover shows a lady reclining in a landscape, with decanters and fruit before her and a girl playing the *kamānchah.* The sides bear panels of landscape in a Europeanizing style, which alternate with bust portraits of young men and women; the portraits have been subject to a little retouching. The base is decorated with sprays of flowers and bees in gold on red. The sides of the sliding compartment have a floral scroll in colours and gold on a red ground.

Both Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi and Adib Boroumand have described the work of Muhammad Qasim on the sole basis of cat.27.[1] Karimzadeh Tabrizi read the date as AH 1129 (AD 1716–17), while Boroumand preferred AH 1124 (AD 1712–13).

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, p.1060, no.1120; Boroumand 1366, p.100.

28

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1117 (AD 1705–6) and later

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 24 × 4.3 × 3.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, ''Aliquli'
accession no. LAQ3
published Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pl.62

The vertical composition on the top of the cover shows an Indian lady holding a fan; she stands by a tree, while ducks float on a stream in the foreground. The painting is extremely fine, and the lady's face is rendered in accordance with late Safavid practice. There is a two-part inscription in *shikastah* on the top of the box. The section above the tree reads, 'To the order of the exalted nobleman', and that below the stream consists of the name 'Aliquli and the date AH 1117.

The sides, however, are painted in an inferior manner that is definitely post-Safavid. The design consists of a continuous landscape containing trees, buildings and figures, one of whom is mounted on a horse, as well as a body of water with boats and a cannon.

There is also a marked difference in decoration between the base of the cover, which has scrollwork in gold on red, and the sliding compartment, with scrollwork of a different kind on a black ground. At the same time, the sliding compartment fits the case rather loosely.

The discrepancies in style and the loose fitting suggest that this pen box was extensively remade in the 19th century: perhaps only the Indian lady on the top of the cover is original. It is certain, though, that pen boxes with this type of decoration were produced during 'Aliquli's lifetime, for a contemporary painting in the St Petersburg album E–14 shows the grand vizier Shahquli Khan presenting a pen box of vertical format decorated with a figure standing in a landscape.[1] As cat.30 and 31 show, there was also a taste for such wares in the 19th century.

'Aliquli Jabadar flourished between 1673 and 1717 and, with Muhammad Zaman, was one of the two main proponents of the eclectic style that prevailed at Isfahan during the late Safavid period.[2] According to two later 18th-century sources, the *Ātashkadah* of Lutf 'Ali Beg Azar and the *Gulshān-i murād* of Abu'l-Hasan Ghaffari Kashani, 'Aliquli Beg was a Frankish convert who painted for the Safavid shahs,[3] but his very imperfect use of perspective suggests that he was not trained in Europe. 'Aliquli often referred to himself as Jabadar (or Jabbah-dar, both meaning 'armourer') and would therefore appear to have been attached to the royal armoury, and Priscilla Soucek has suggested that he came to Iran as a military expert and was only subsequently pressed into service as a painter. But 'Aliquli also referred to himself repeatedly as *ghulāmzādah-yi qadīm* ('former slave born in servitude'),[4] and this seems to indicate that he was born in Iran. As he signed other work as 'Aliquli Arna'ut,[5] it may be that his father was an Albanian slave. If so, his reputed Frankish origin would be a conflation of his father being an Albanian and his work in a Europeanizing style. In short, it seems probable that 'Aliquli's contact with European painting was no more intense than his contact with Indian painting, which was also an important stylistic and thematic source for the artist's work, as was, of course, the Iranian tradition.

'Aliquli's work as a lacquer-painter is not well-documented. Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi listed three pen boxes signed by this artist, including cat.28.[6]

1. Soudavar 1992, p.378, fig.52; Akimushkin 1994, p.86.
2. Soucek 1985; see also Anthony Welch 1973, pp.148–9.
3. Diba 1989b, p.148.
4. Ivanov, Grek & Akimushkin 1962, pls 96, 98, 99, for example.
5. Ivanov, Grek & Akimushkin 1962, pl.77, for example.
6. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.388–97, no.682.

29

Pen box
Isfahan, *circa* 1700

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.3 × 3.7 × 3.5 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'The most humble 'Aliquli'
accession no. LAQ424

The painted scene on the top of the cover, disposed vertically on the narrow surface, shows an Indian lady in a gold brocade dress. She stands in a landscape and looks upwards, her face in profile, and runs her fingers through her loosened hair. The sides show sprays of various flowers on a dark-brown ground. The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are plain black with ruled gold edges.

30

Pen box
Isfahan, 18th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.5 × 3.9 × 3.5 cm
accession no. LAQ227

A vertically composed scene on the top of the cover shows a youth in a landscape. The youth wears late Safavid costume and carries a falcon on his wrist. The sides are decorated with landscape panels, while those of the sliding compartment are painted in gold with flowers and buildings. The base of the cover is red, with narrow, ruled gold edges.

The cover originally bore a signature and date, written in black, above the tree top, but these have been chipped off.

31

Pen box
Iran, third quarter of the 19th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 22 × 3.7 × 3.5 cm
accession no. LAQ55

The figure of an Indian lady on the top of the cover is close in every detail to that on cat.29, above, of which this piece may well be a 19th-century copy. The landscape in which she stands is also very similar, as is the succession of flowering plants on an olive-brown ground depicted on the sides. The plants include tulips, roses, hyacinths and carnations, and there is also a butterfly.

The base of the cover and the sides of the sliding compartment are painted black, with narrow ruled gold edges.







27 top, side, base

26

Pen box
Isfahan, AH 1124 (AD 1712–13)

Papier-mâché body and lift-off lid with rounded ends, 36.5 × 8.8 × 8.2 cm, and a lift-out inner compartment, all lined with leather.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by Hajji Muhammad.'
accession no. LAQ361
published Adle 1980, pp.9–28; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pl.70

The decoration of this large pen box is of superb quality, and the study of Chahryar Adle, referred to above (pp.54–7), has made it one of the best known examples of bookbinder's lacquer.[1] The lid is painted inside and out with horizontal compositions. The top shows a landscape with trees and buildings of European type; in the foreground three Persian couples are depicted in various stages of amorous dalliance, and there are two girl musicians at the right-hand end. Adle has suggested that the three couples, read from right to left, represent the triumph of mystic love over mere carnality.[2] On the inside of the lid a brilliant flower-and-bird study, painted after a design by Muhammad Zaman,[3] is set against a background of gold leaf, with roses, hyacinths, primroses and apple blossom, five beautiful birds and several butterflies.

The sides of the box are painted with four landscapes of European inspiration. These are separated by bust portraits of women, European and Asiatic, set in ovals. The dark-red base is painted with vines in gold and black.

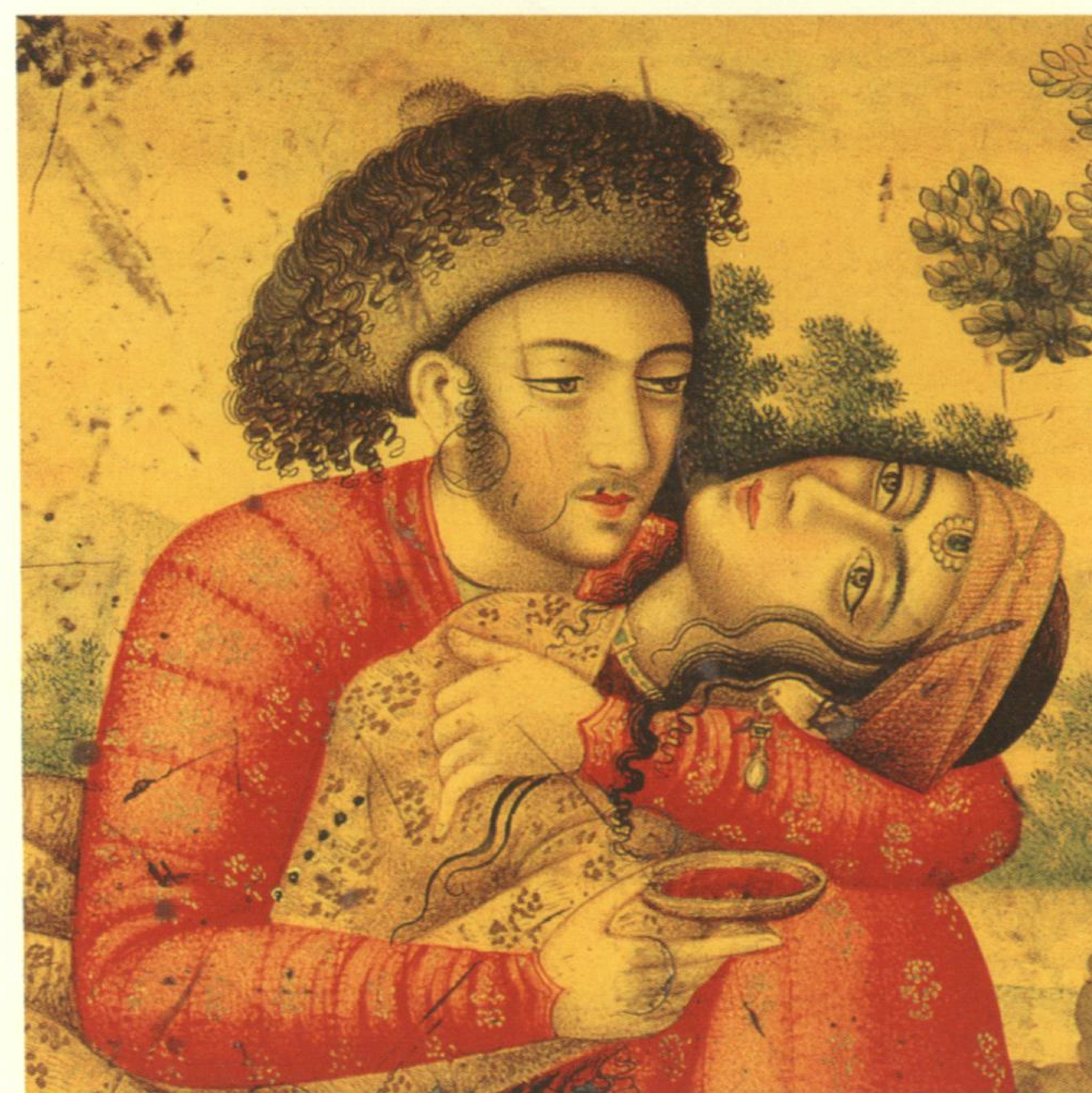
Although the box now has a lift-off lid, it may once have had a hinged lid, for the holes for the attachment of the hasp remain.

The signature on this box appears to be deliberately defaced, probably to allow attribution to a more celebrated painter. All that can now be read with any certainty is the final word of the signature, ... *Muḥammad*, and the word *sanah* ('year') under the date. But in the 1970s Adle was able to read the signature as a whole as *rāqimuhu Ḥajjī Muḥammad* and the date as 1124. Another example of Hajji Muhammad's work in the Khalili Collection (cat.37) is dated AH 1116 (AD 1704–5).

An old ticket in the interior of the pen box reads, 'On loan from Capt. Myers, Nov 1894'.

1. For a more detailed description of the scenes on the lid and sides, see pp.55–6 above.
2. Adle 1980, pp.13–15.
3. Adle 1980, p.18.





26 details of lid









26 top of lid, side view, inside of lid, base

most often with Shaykh 'Abbasi, whose signature can be seen on cat. 12 and cat. 13, but also practised by the painter Amin who executed cat. 18 (see pp. 44–7 above). A third style was that developed by Muhammad Zaman. His new mode of figural painting and his new type of flower-and-bird composition were both used on cat. 26, together with illuminated designs, and all three elements appear in combination or independently on the vast majority of Iranian bookbinder's lacquer produced in the course of the 18th century. In other words, the school of Muhammad Zaman was the only one of the schools of painting practised in the second half of the 17th century to survive into the 18th century, and that school had a virtual monopoly of bookbinder's lacquer production.

1. A pen box with figural decoration made for (*ba-amr-i*) Shah Sulayman by Muhammad Zaman in AH 1084 (AD 1672–3) was recorded in the collection of Mme Ezzat Soudavar; see Zoka' 1354a, pp. 46–7, and figs 9–12; Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p. 110; Diba 1989a, p. 244, and pl. 4; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp. 788–9; Soudavar 1992, p. 377, fig. 51 (detail). On the European sources of this style, see Sims 1983, especially p. 78.
2. For a pen box with a flower-and-bird design made by Muhammad Zaman 'in obedience to an order from the highest level', see Zoka' 1354a, pp. 47–8, and figs 13–16; Adle 1980, fig. 8; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p. 790. This item is in the Museum of Ancient Iran, Tehran (inv. no. 4372). Muhammad Zaman's earlier work in this genre (see note 5 below, a pen box of AH 1070) is closer to the style of Shafi' 'Abbasi (Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p. 111).
3. The signature and date have been all but obliterated. The most likely explanation for this is that the obscure character of the signature led to it and the date being scratched out so that the box could be attributed orally to a famous artist, perhaps to Muhammad Zaman himself.
4. Adle 1980.
5. For the floruit of Hajji Muhammad, see Adle 1980, pp. 29–54. For that of Muhammad Zaman, see a pen box inscribed *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* and dated AH 1070 (AD 1659–60; Zoka' 1354a, pp. 44–5, and figs 2, 3; Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p. 111, and figs 1, 2; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p. 786) and a pen box of his son Muhammad 'Ali dated AH 1112 (AD 1700–1), on which Muhammad Zaman is described as 'the late' (St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum, inv. no. UR–126; Ivanov 1960; Diba 1989b, p. 149). The exclamation *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!') is generally thought to have originated as a crypto-signature of Muhammad Zaman.
6. Adle 1980, n. 25 (on p. 14).
7. Adle 1980, pp. 13–15.
8. Adle 1980, n. 28 (on pp. 14–15); Rumi–Nicholson, VI, pp. 82–7, 236–7.
9. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS. 469, folio 124b; Zoka' 1354a, pl. 36; Adle 1980, fig. 9.
10. The figures are identified by Zoka' (1354a, p. 50) as Khusraw and Shirin themselves.
11. He is referred to in the artist's signature on folio 132a; see Zoka' 1354a, p. 50.
12. Folio 111b; Zoka' 1354a, pl. 34; Adle 1980, fig. 10.
13. Inv. no. 4373; Adle 1980, fig. 28.
14. See note 2 above.
15. Adle 1980, p. 18.
16. Zoka' 1354a, p. 56, n. 1; Ivanov 1979, p. 51; Adle 1980, pp. 26–7.
17. Collection of Eskandar Arieh; see Zoka' 1354a, pl. 50; Melikian-Chirvani 1977, p. 110; Adle 1980, fig. 12. On the exclamation, see note 5 above.
18. Adle (1980, pp. 15–17) distinguished between the painting on the lid of cat. 26, which he attributed to Hajji Muhammad himself, and that on the sides of the box, which he saw predominantly as the work of Hajji Muhammad's pupils.
19. Adle 1980, pp. 27–8.
20. Zoka' 1354a, p. 48, n. 1. On the miniature, which is on folio 120b, see Adle 1980, pp. 33–7.
21. Ivanov 1979, pp. 69–70.
22. On the date of Muhammad Zaman's death, see note 5. On the first pen box by Muhammad Ibrahim (Tehran, private collection), see Adle 1980, pp. 29–33. On the second (St Petersburg, State Hermitage, inv. no. UR–17), see Ivanov 1970; Adle 1980, pp. 37–42.
23. As on one of the miniatures in the Pierpont Morgan *Khamsah*, and in the verses inscribed on the pen box made for Shah Sulayman, referred to in note 1 above.
24. Adle 1980, pp. 56–7.
25. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp. 594–604 (no. 864).
26. Adle 1980, p. 57.

Muhammad, in AH 1122 (AD 1710), which occurs on the top of a pen box in the Museum of Ancient Iran in Tehran,[13] a more telling parallel has been drawn by Adle to a flower-and-bird composition on the top of another pen box in the same museum, which was signed by Muhammad Zaman and dated Rabi' I 1082 (July–August 1671).[14] Although the ground is a different colour, and there are variations in detail, the layout and the choice of motifs are identical.[15]

There are also parallels with the work of Muhammad Zaman both in the general style of the backgrounds of the external decoration of cat.26 and in the details. The broken tree trunk that appears in the left foreground on the lid has been identified as characteristic of his work by many authorities,[16] while the garden wall with a high gateway in the centre of one side – in the background on the extreme left – is found in the same position on a pen box dated AH 1109 (AD 1697–8) that has been attributed to Muhammad Zaman on stylistic grounds and on the basis of the inscription *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* ('O Lord of the Age!').[17] This feature also appears in the landscape painted on one end of the base of the pen box, although Adle noted that the perspective was badly handled and attributed it to a junior member of Hajji Muhammad's atelier.[18] The same landscape contains an avenue of cypresses leading to a monumental portal, a motif found in two miniatures by Muhammad Zaman (and on the side of cat.33), and a line of birds flying in formation in the sky above, which, like the broken tree trunk, is one of that painter's favourite topoi.

Adle concluded from these many parallels that the work of Hajji Muhammad was based almost entirely on the style developed by his brother Muhammad Zaman, but he considered that Hajji Muhammad had contributed a new emotional expressiveness that reflected the troubled times in which he lived.[19] Indeed, the existence of the Hajji Muhammad signature has led Adle and others to attribute certain traits, both positive and negative, to the work signed Hajji Muhammad, in order to contrast it with that signed Muhammad Zaman. Yahya Zoka', for example, professed to detect an inferior hand in a miniature in the *Khamsah* manuscript in the Pierpont Morgan Library that is signed Hajji Muhammad,[20] although the general standard of execution is in fact just as second-rate as in the other examples, and the quality of the drawing is, if anything, better than in some of those signed Muhammad Zaman.

It should be remembered, however, that there is no corroborating literary or documentary evidence to show that Muhammad Zaman and Hajji Muhammad were not one and the same person, and one scholar at least has surmised that Hajji Muhammad was merely one of many versions of Muhammad Zaman's name, one he adopted after he had performed the Hajj.[21] The main evidence against this theory is that Muhammad Zaman was dead by 1700, while Hajji Muhammad continued to work until 1712–13, as shown by cat.26. Muhammad Zaman did have at least one brother, Muhammad Ibrahim of Qum, son of Hajji Yusuf, who signed two pen boxes, one made for a Safavid official in 1673, the other dated 1681.[22] Adle argued that Hajji Muhammad was to be identified with Muhammad Ibrahim because, when Muhammad Zaman signed himself with only one element of his name,[23] he chose Zaman rather than Muhammad.[24] He did not explain, however, why Muhammad Ibrahim did not style himself Hajji Ibrahim on performing the Hajj, as his father had been Hajji Yusuf. A third possibility, since championed by Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh,[25] is that Hajji Muhammad was a third son of Hajji Yusuf of Qum. For his part, Adle found it improbable that there could have been a third brother of such talent who was called merely Muhammad.[26]

Despite this lack of clarity as to the membership of Muhammad Zaman's immediate family, the artistic achievement of this group of artists is clear. During the second half of the 17th century a number of different styles were practised by Iranian painters. One was employed by the school of Riza 'Abbasi, which included Mu'in Musavvir, the painter responsible for the decoration of cat.17 (see pp.38–41 above). Another was the style associated

buildings in the background. Each scene depicts a handsome couple in an amorous embrace. In the scene on the right the young man is seated on the ground, while the woman has placed her legs on either side of him, a pose that is seen in earlier Iranian depictions of sexual intercourse.[6] She has pulled her skirts up and her pants down in readiness, but she looks away from her partner, gazing over her shoulder and towards the viewer, with a slight smile on her lips and a sad look in her large eyes, while the man helps to open her legs with one hand and with the other caresses a lock of her hair, which he regards with a melancholy intensity. Yet he has made no attempt to prepare himself for intercourse. To the right two women are seated; one is playing a large tambourine, the other is gazing at the viewer and raising her hand to indicate the lovers. In the other two scenes the couple are both fully clothed. The man in the middle scene is seated on the ground, with his left knee raised, while the woman lies in his lap. In his right hand he holds a cup of wine, but he gazes at her face, which is turned up and away. In the third scene both figures are seated on the ground, and the woman appears to have taken the lead, for she has placed her left arm around her lover's shoulders. The fingers of her other hand are clasped in his, and he has a lock of her hair between the thumb and index finger of his right hand. The woman gazes at the man, but he is shown in strict profile, looking away to the left.

According to Adle,[7] these scenes are not to be taken simply as depictions of sexual dalliance, as they might be if they were read from left to right, for, read from right to left, they depict the defeat of carnality by the love that leads to mystic union. To support his argument he pointed out that Persian literature contains many sexually explicit stories whose object is moral and didactic, and indeed two of the examples he gives from the *Maṣnavī* of Jalal al-Din al-Rumi are so sexually explicit that R.A. Nicholson clothed them in Latin in his English translation of the work.[8] In Adle's interpretation of the first two scenes (those on the right and in the centre), 'everything necessary seems to be present ... for the attainment of physical love, which nevertheless is not achieved.' In the first the man is indifferent to the woman's explicit advances, while in the second it is the woman who shows no interest in her partner's blandishments, despite her limp submission to his embrace. The third image 'is free of any lascivious element; its very sweetness evinces Mystic Union and Fulfilment'.

The literary connection of these images is made all the more clear by Adle's identification of the model for the third scene with a miniature in a copy of the *Khamsah*, or 'Five Tales', of Nizami in the Pierpont Morgan Library, which was produced between 1675 and 1678.[9] The miniature illustrates an episode in the romance of *Khusraw and Shirin* and shows two lovers seated together on a terrace,[10] in exactly the same pose as on the pen box, although, of course, the setting was eliminated, and the details of dress and physiognomy were altered. The quality of execution was higher on the pen box than in the manuscript, and, as the patron of the manuscript, or at least of the illustrations, was a provincial functionary, Mirza Muhammad Ma'sum, the governor of the province of Rasht,[11] this suggests that the pen box may have been commissioned by a person of higher rank at the court of Shah Sultan Husayn. Adle also alluded to the similarity between the second scene on the pen box and another miniature in the same manuscript, which shows Khusraw embracing a slave girl.[12] In this case the figures have been reversed, and the action has been adapted to Hajji Muhammad's theme, so that the young man is shown tempting the woman with a cup of wine. Both miniatures in question were signed by Muhammad Zaman, and the same painter's work appears to have provided the models for other aspects of the decoration of the pen box.

Hajji Muhammad and Muhammad Zaman

The flower-and-bird composition on the inside of the lid of cat. 26 includes five small birds, a variety of insects and a range of spring flowers, including an iris, a single and a double rose, three types of fruit-tree blossom, pansies, a hyacinth, primroses and a tulip. While this composition may be compared with another flower-and-bird design executed by Hajji

The pen box and the miniature

A masterpiece by Hajji Muhammad

In Isfahan in the later 17th century a number of changes took place in the production of bookbinder's lacquer. One was the relative decline of bookbindings as the principal form of production, coinciding with an increase in the importance of other types of painted and varnished papier-mâché objects, most notably the pen box and the mirror case. It is possible that a lower survival rate of such items from earlier periods has distorted the evidence, and that this change is only apparent. But it is a fact that from the 1670s pen boxes that bear figural miniature paintings in a new Europeanizing style began to be produced for the Safavid court by a leading artist of the period, Muhammad Zaman ibn Hajji Yusuf.[1] No lacquer pen boxes decorated in the figural style of the earlier 17th century are known, and no bookbindings of the later 17th century decorated in the new style have been identified. The available evidence suggests that there was a definite change in taste that emanated from the court of Shah Sulayman (*reg.* 1666–1694) and that it was associated with the Shah's patronage of Muhammad Zaman and his atelier. This development was to be of great importance, establishing pen boxes and other items decorated with figural motifs as a mainstay of Iranian lacquer production until the 20th century. At the same time Muhammad Zaman appears to have reformulated the tradition of flower and flower-and-bird studies current in Isfahan in the early and mid-17th century,[2] and his type of flower-and-bird design remained a regular feature of lacquer production until the 20th century.

To judge the first of these changes one needs to recall that from the early 16th century figural scenes on lacquer bindings consisted of groups of figures executed in the traditional Islamic manner, using line and colour, and set in fantastic landscapes derived from Chinese sources; the various elements were outlined in gold against a solid coloured ground (an example is cat.6). On the figural pen boxes of the later 17th century, however, the Chinese-inspired element had been eclipsed, while the Islamic miniature painting style had been radically reformed into an illusionistic painting heavily dependent on European prototypes.

A pen box in the Collection (cat.26) is a particularly fine example of lacquerware exhibiting not only this new type of figural decoration, but also the type of flower-and-bird painting developed by Muhammad Zaman. This pen box was signed on the lid by an artist calling himself Hajji Muhammad and dated AH 1124 (AD 1712–13), and it thus belongs to the reign of Shah Sulayman's successor, Shah Sultan Husayn (1694–1722).[3]

Cat.26 has been the subject of an important study by Chahryar Adle,[4] who explained the image on the lid as an allegory of the defeat of carnality and the triumph of mystic love. He also related the piece stylistically to the work of Muhammad Zaman and argued that the Hajji Muhammad who signed cat.26 and six other works was the brother of Muhammad Zaman. Finally, he traced the school of Muhammad Zaman over several generations, from its founder (*fl.* 1659–before 1700) and his brother (*fl.* 1673–1713);[5] to Muhammad Zaman's son Muhammad 'Ali (*fl.* 1700–21), who painted cat.34–6; through three 18th-century painters whose identity is discussed in detail in another essay, 'Ali Ashraf, Muhammad Baqir and Muhammad Sadiq (see pp.72–7); to Mirza Baba and the court artists of the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah (1797–1834). The Khalili Collection's extensive holdings of 18th-century pen boxes, mirrors and bindings with figural and flower-and-bird decoration confirm Adle's conclusions about the continuity of Muhammad Zaman's tradition; indeed, another item in the Collection also signed by Hajji Muhammad, cat.37, provides an important stylistic link between his generation and that of 'Ali Ashraf. From this material it is clear that the school of Muhammad Zaman dominated the production of these types of bookbinder's lacquer in Isfahan throughout the 18th century and into the 19th, although the precise identity of individual members of the school remains obscure.

Carnality and mystic love

The lid of cat.26 is painted with a horizontal sequence of three scenes, all set within the same continuous European-style landscape but clearly separated by groups of trees and

24

Pair of book covers
Iran or India, AH 1124 (AD 1712–13)

Papier-mâché boards, each 22 × 14.3 cm, with leather trim and doublures. The decoration is signed, 'He! The humble Muhammad Masih'
accession no. LAQ6

Each cover is painted with a very similar group of flowers on a gold ground, within a black frame decorated with scrollwork in gold. The upper part of each design is occupied by a large peony, below which there are tulips, gentians and primroses. The signature and the date are on one cover only.

In addition to cat.24, this painter was known to Karimzadeh Tabrizi from five watercolours and a mirror case dated between AH 1115 (AD 1703–4) and AH 1133 (AD 1720–21).[1] On this evidence he defined Muhammad Masih as an artist who worked in India in a style based on that of Muhammad Zaman ibn Hajji Yusuf. The links with India and Muhammad Zaman were not substantiated, however.

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1083–4, no.1124; two of the works listed, nos 7 and 8, are clearly the same.

25

Pair of book covers
Isfahan, later 17th century

Cloth bases with leather trim and doublures, each 11.8 × 6.2 cm, mounted together on a card, 26 × 15 cm
accession no. LAQ471

The horizontal format of these covers suggests that they were made for an anthology of poetry in *safinah* form. The decoration consists primarily of massed rose sprays, among which several small birds hunt butterflies; there is a single scabious flower at the base. As in cat.18–20 and 24, the composition is set against a yellow ground, but here the motifs are outlined in gold, an archaic feature in so naturalistic a design. The outer covers are trimmed with plain, dark-red leather, and the doublures are of similar leather, decorated with a frame ruled in gold.

Lacquer bindings with polychrome floral decoration on a yellow ground clearly enjoyed a vogue in the 17th and early 18th centuries, but in the other four examples shown here the plants are arranged in a rather formal fashion, as though they were merely filling up the rectangular space.[1] On the present binding, though, the design is more sophisticated, and the painting is exquisite. Cat.25 also appears to have been made using a different technique, for the wear the original covers have suffered is due to their being painted on to a supple base of dressed cloth rather than on to papier mâché.

The quality of the binding is reflected in the care with which it has been treated, despite its damaged state: the two covers have been mounted together on a piece of gold-tooled and leather-trimmed card to make a larger binding of vertical format, and in the process the leather trim on the adjacent edges of the two covers has been removed, and the strip beneath repainted, in order to create a single panel.

1. Note the creeper on cat.18 and the convolvulus on cat.19, neither of which has any visible means of support.



25 outer covers



24 outer covers













21, 22, 23

Three pen boxes and the work of Shafi' 'Abbasi

21

Pen box
Iran or India, AH 1041 (AD 1631–2)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 23.8 × 4.6 × 4.3 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the humble Shafi' 'Abbasi.'
accession no. LAQ372

22

Pen box
Iran or India, AH 1061 (AD 1650–51)

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 25.5 × 6 × 5.8 cm.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the humble Shafi' 'Abbasi.'
accession no. LAQ143

23

Pen box
Iran or India, 17th century

Papier-mâché cover and sliding compartment with rounded ends, 27.7 × 5.2 × 4.4 cm
accession no. LAQ339

Although these three pen boxes are all of the type with a sliding compartment, and all three have the same variety of floral decoration on a gold ground, they are structurally very different, and the decoration varies in the colours used, the type of gold employed for the background, and the rendition of the motifs.

Cat.22 is the largest and coarsest; the base of the cover is plain red, and the sides of the sliding compartment are faced with leather. Cat.21 is the smallest and has a domed top. The base of the cover has a diaper pattern in gold on red, which is set with a simple stylized flower motif, and the same flower appears in the scroll design in the same colours on the sides of the sliding compartment; the scroll is framed by ornamental bands of a type that appears on the subsidiary surfaces of Kashmiri lacquer pen boxes of the 19th century, such as cat.211–13 below, which indicates that cat.21 was remade in India in the same period. Cat.23 is the most elegant of the three and has a much flatter top. The base of the cover has a row of individual flowering plants, rendered in gold on a red ground, and a vine motif in the same colours fills the sides of the sliding compartment.

On this basis it would be impossible to ascribe these pieces to the same workshop, but the close similarities between the type of floral ornament employed on the principal surfaces remain to be explained. The sides of the covers have rows of individual flowering plants, which are visited by insects, while the tops have a row of similar flowering plants growing from the base line and populated by small birds. The similarities between the principal designs would appear to be the result of a connection with Shafi' 'Abbasi, whose signature is seen on cat.21 and cat.22.

This artist was active in Isfahan from the 1630s to the 1650s, and according to P.W. Schulz he later went to India and died in Agra in AH 1085 (AD 1674–5), although no sources were cited to support this assertion.[1] Some of his celebrated bird-and-flower and flower studies were presumed to have been produced as patterns for textile production,[2] and some examples of his work in an album once owned by Gerald Cobb and now preserved in the British Museum have indeed been pricked for pouncing.[3] It is therefore perfectly possible that the three pen boxes were produced by Shafi' or after designs prepared by him, either in the form of stencils or finished pen boxes. The original pattern need not even have been produced for a pen box, as the surfaces to be decorated match those of the top and bottom sections of the illuminated margins of manuscripts and albums, for example.[4]

One of the drawings in the Cobb album was completed at the *madrasah* of Mawlana 'Abdallah on Wednesday, 3 Muharram 1050 (25 April 1640), and the artist signed himself as Muhammad Shafi' Isfahani.[5] Another study is dated Monday, 5 Muharram 1054 (14 March 1644) and bears an impression of his seal, which was itself dated AH 1046 (AD 1636–7) and engraved with the pious legend, *Muḥammad shud shafī'-i har du 'ālam* ('Muhammad became the intercessor for both worlds').[6] This evidence is in accord with the view that the artist did not acquire the surname 'Abbasi until the reign of Shah 'Abbas II (1642–1666).[7] If this is so, the dates and perhaps also the signatures on pieces signed with the name Shafi' 'Abbasi and bearing dates before 'Abbas II's accession in AD 1642 fall under suspicion; a particularly egregious example is a drawing of *Yusuf at the Court of Zulaykha* in the British Museum, which is dated AH 1028 (AD 1618–19), more than a decade before the artist's accepted floruit.[8]

The date on cat.21, namely, AH 1041 (AD 1631–2), is too early to be original according to this criterion, but in this case the signature interrupts the framing band on the top of the box, while the date was written separately and beneath the band: it is possible therefore that the date is a later addition, but the signature is genuine.

1. Schulz 1914, I, p.194; Kühnel 1938–9, p.1894; Gray 1959, p.220; Stchoukine 1964, p.80.
2. Ackerman 1938–9, p.2131, pl.1065 c.
3. Gray 1959; Sotheby's, London, 11 April 1986, lot no.80.
4. *Cf.* Ivanov, Grek & Akimushkin 1962, pls 9, 21, 28, for example.
5. Folio 35; Gray 1959, pl.D.
6. Folio 45; Gray 1959, pl.C.
7. Kühnel 1938–9, p.1894.
8. Rogers 1983, no.58.




19 outer covers




20 outer covers



18 outer covers

18

Pair of book covers
Perhaps Isfahan, AH 1070 (AD 1659–60)

Papier-mâché boards, each 13.4 × 7 cm, with leather doublures.
The decoration is signed, 'Painted by the worthless speck of dust Amin.'
accession no. LAQ469

The horizontal format of this binding suggests that it was designed for a book in *safīnah* form (that is, a small album bound along one of the shorter sides). The outer covers, which are almost identical, show an iris plant, a small fruit tree and a creeper growing from the base; as is normal in such compositions, insects of various types hover around them. The flowers are set against a yellow ground, and the black borders are decorated with floral scrolls in gold. The doublures are of plain red leather.

Only one board is signed, in black *nasta'līq*, to the left of the central iris.

19

Pair of book covers
Iran or India, late 17th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 21.6 × 10.7 cm, set within later leather covers, 23 × 15.5 cm, with leather doublures
accession no. LAQ141

The original covers have carnation, rose, convolvulus, tulip and other flowering plants arranged in rows on a gold ground; butterflies and other insects hover round the plants. The two compositions include a different selection of plants, but both are framed by a black border decorated with scrollwork in gold. At a later stage these lacquer boards were reset within a leather binding block-pressed with poetic inscriptions in Persian in the *nasta'līq* script. These read, 'This binding, with designs as fine as the features of the fair, is embellished with a form that gives pleasure to the beholder. Or it is the gate to paradise from the world of grace, which is opened for the beholder of this book.'

The doublures have a medallion and pendants of leather filigree.

20

Pair of book covers
Iran or India, AH 1105 (AD 1693–4) or earlier

Papier-mâché boards, each 25.9 × 15.7 cm, set within later papier-mâché borders, each 30.9 × 20.7 cm, with leather spines and doublures.
The calligraphy is signed, 'Written by the least of God's worshippers, Muhammad Ibrahim al-Katib al-Sultani.'
accession no. LAQ515

Like cat.19, which it closely resembles, this binding appears to have been made in two stages, as the inscribed border is structurally distinct. The text consists of the Light Verse (*Āyat al-Nūr*; Qur'an, surah XXXIV, verse 35), followed by verse 36 of surah XXIV, followed in turn by the calligrapher's signature and the date. The main fields of the two covers are almost identical in design: they display a dozen or so flowering plants, arranged in rows in a manner associated with Mughal art, on a solid gold ground. The plants include pinks, primroses, crocus, tulips, roses, convolvulus, violets and poppies.

The Muhammad Ibrahim who wrote the inscriptions on this binding was probably Muhammad Ibrahim ibn Muhammad Nasir of Qum, the celebrated *naskh* calligrapher who was tutor to Ahmad al-Nayrizi.[1] The pupil occasionally used the title al-Sultani between 1698 and 1707,[2] indicating an association with the Safavid shah Sultan Husayn, and the title used by the calligrapher on this binding, al-Katib al-Sultani, may be interpreted in the same manner, especially since AH 1105 was the year of Sultan Husayn's accession. Muhammad Ibrahim died after AH 1115 (AD 1703–4).[3]

The original binding may be Indian, but the close cultural ties between Iran and the subcontinent in the 17th century (see pp.44–6 above) may explain its Indian appearance. In any case it was in Iran by 1695.

1. See cat.115 below, and Safwat 1996, pp.212–13.
2. Bayani 1345–58, IV, pp.19–31, no.64.
3. Bayani 1345–58, IV, pp.625–6, no.849.

1. The full form of Amin's name would have been Muhammad Amin (on the link between the two elements, see Cahen 1960). This was a relatively common name among Iranian men in the 16th and 17th centuries, so that Mehdi Bayani, for example, listed 22 calligraphers called Muhammad Amin, 18 of whom flourished in the Safavid period (1501–1732); see Bayani 1345–58, III, pp.645–51, nos 884–98; IV, pp.132, 137–8, nos 399, 412–15; IV, pp.257–8, nos 5, 6. Three of the calligraphers he listed are known to have worked in the second half of the 17th century or the early 18th. One (III, no.890) was Mir Muhammad Amin Sayfi, a grandson of Mir 'Imad (see note 8 below); another (III, no.897) was Muhammad Amin Mashhadi, who played an important role in luxury manuscript production at the Mughal court in the third quarter of the 17th century; and the third (IV, no.399) was Muhammad Amin Astarabadi, whom Bayani identified on the basis of a single specimen in his own collection, dated AH 1063 (AD 1652–3). Further research may reveal connections between one or more of these calligraphers and one or both of the painters discussed here.

2. Honarfar 1344, pp.109–15; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.654, no.938.

3. A third 17th-century painter of this name was identified by Karimzadeh Tabrizi (1985–91, II, p.652, no.934) on the basis of a portrait of a dervish signed simply 'Muhammad Amin'.

4. Nasrabadi, pp.132–4. The entry on Sakit must have been prepared while Shayistah Khan was governor of Bengal, for the poet is said to have been a member of his suite there (see below). Shayistah Khan held the post from May 1663 to April 1677 and then from September 1679 to perhaps 1688 or 1689 (see Zambaur 1927, p.301). He died in Agra in 1694.

5. Storey 1927–53, part 2, pp.818–21, no.1130.

6. Rypka 1968, pp.301–2; Yar-Shater 1974. Sa'ib (Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Tabrizi) was born in 1601–2 near Isfahan, where he died in AD 1677–8. He spent six years in India in the late 1620s and early 1630s, before returning to Isfahan, where he eventually became *malik al-shu'arā'* ('king of poets') under 'Abbas II. One of Sa'ib's own tutors was the physician and poet Hakim Shifa'i (Sharaf al-Din Hasan Isfahani; d. 1628), whose portrait by Riza 'Abbasi was copied by Mu'in Musavvir (see p.38 and notes 6, 7 on p.41 above).

7. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pp.652–3, no.935; *cf.* Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.92, no.148, which appears to be an earlier version of the same entry.

8. The calligrapher Mir Muhammad Amin Sayfi, who was recorded by Mehdi Bayani as active between 1700 and 1715 (Bayani 1345–58, III, pp.647–8, no.890; see note 1 above), also used the expression 'an insubstantial speck of dust' in his signatures, as well as indicating that he was a 'descendant of the late Mir 'Imad al-Hasani'. The similarity of their signatures, and the presence of calligraphic devices in the decoration of the tilework in Isfahan referred to above, would suggest that the tile-painter and the calligrapher were the same person, but Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi (see above) did not refer, as one would have expected, to a connection between the tile-painter Muhammad Amin and Mir 'Imad. One of the two was presumably responsible for a calligraphic piece signed by a scribe called Muhammad Amin and dated AH 1108 (AD 1696–7); Anthony Welch 1973, no.86.

9. Yar-Shater 1974, p.230.

10. Yar-Shater 1974, p.236.

11. Anthony Welch 1985, no.151.

12. Welch & Welch 1982, no.75; Anthony Welch 1985, no.151. Robert Skelton informs us that there is a similar painting in the St Petersburg album Dorn 289. *Cf.* also Zoka' 1354a, fig.7 (Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, pl.64); and Gray 1979, fig.220.

13. Cat.18 can be compared with the early pen boxes in the Khalili Collection, which are decorated with subsidiary motifs that were borrowed from another art form.

14. Yar-Shater 1974, p.220, n.10 (on pp.259–60).

15. Sotheby's, London, 9 December 1975, lot no.249; Welch & Welch 1982, no.76.

16. The second version is Robinson 1976a, no.59.

17. Khandalavala & Chandra 1965, no.55. Our thanks to Robert Skelton for this reference. He has also brought to our attention an undated miniature in the Custodia Collection in Paris (Sotheby's, London, 9 October 1976, lot no. 196) with the signature *raqam-i kamīnah Bahrām ...*; and a study of a *Horse and groom* in Norfolk, Virginia (Norfolk Museum, Grandy Art Trust Fund Purchase, 1958–60). This last is signed *Yā Ṣāḥib al-Zamān* and dated AH 1109 (AD 1697–8), but it is very much in Bahram's style.

18. Skelton 1985; Soudavar 1992, no.145. Soudavar (p.379, n.7) reported another work by Bahram in Tehran.

19. See Gray 1959, for example.

20. In fact, a facet of Shaykh 'Abbasi's mature work may explain an otherwise obscure feature of *Two doves in a vernal landscape*. In cat.12, by Shaykh 'Abbasi, the main figure has been placed in an ideal landscape of a sub-Frankish character, marked by a grassy hillock in the lower half of the field, by scattered groups of trees and buildings receding into the distance above the hillock, and by a blank upper zone suggesting the sky; there is no explicit horizon. In *Two doves* the low horizon suggested by the profile of the grass-green, flower-strewn mound in the foreground is undermined by the placing of smaller flowering-plant motifs on the buff ground. The background of cat.12 suggests that this was a deliberate attempt to suggest a receding background in the European manner, although Amin merely succeeded in eliding the horizon, and thereby destroying a convention of Islamic painting.

21. Binyon, Wilkinson & Gray 1933, no.358; Stchoukine 1964, p.46; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.106, no.184.

22. The surname Sufrah-kash was presumably a minor court title, equivalent to the earlier Sufrah-chi, both indicating the page responsible for laying out the Shah's table.

23. Stchoukine 1964, p.49; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, p.105, no.179; p.129, no.224. For examples of paintings in the Kaempfer Album signed by 'Jani Farangisaz, son of the late Ustad Bahram Farangisaz' and dated Isfahan, 15 Dhu'l-Hijjah 1096 (13 November 1685), see Canby 1993, figs 78, 79.

with the Ustad Bahram Farangisaz whose son Jani was employed as an artist by Engelbert Kaempfer while the Westphalian was in Isfahan in 1685.[23]

If these assumptions are taken together with the stylistic evidence of the signed works of Bahram Sufrah-kash, the following account may be given. An artist called Bahram worked in Isfahan from late in the reign of Shah 'Abbas I (d. 1629). His most famous pupil was Shaykh 'Abbasi, who was active during the reigns of Shah 'Abbas II (1642–1666) and Shah Sulayman (1666–1694), but his followers also included the Amin of cat.18, who flourished in the reign of Shah 'Abbas II, and perhaps also Bahram's own son Jani, who was employed by Kaempfer in the reign of Shah Sulayman. This reconstruction satisfyingly accounts for all the available scraps of information on Bahram, and it places the charming work of Muhammad Amin in its artistic context: a school of painting heavily indebted to European and Indian models that originated in the reign of Shah 'Abbas I and continued to flourish throughout the 17th century. But many questions still need to be resolved, not least that of whether the Muhammad Amin who was active in the period 1658–1660 and the tile-painter who signed himself 'the insubstantial speck of dust Muhammad Amin' in 1700 or 1701 were one and the same person.

similarities between the flower-and-bird painting, which Anthony Welch called *A floral fantasy*, but which is more precisely described as *Two doves in a vernal landscape*, and cat.18. Indeed, the design on cat.18 would appear to have been composed from subsidiary motifs in *Two doves in a vernal landscape* or a similar work. For example, the diminutive iris plant with a fan of blade-like leaves that appears in the bottom left-hand corner of the painting reappears as one of the two central motifs on the binding.[13] The painting is a rather formal affair, but despite this, and despite the inconsistent scaling of the motifs, the emphasis on verisimilitude is notably greater than on the binding: whereas the flowering vine in the centre of the painting is supported by the boughs of blossom to which its tendrils have attached themselves, the flowering vines of the same type on the binding have been expanded to fill the spaces on either side of the central motifs and are without visible means of support. This arrangement is in tune with the purely ornamental character of painting on bookbinder's lacquer at this date.

Two mutually exclusive attributions have been offered for *Two doves in a vernal landscape*, however. The first, made by Anthony Welch, ascribed the painting to the Deccan, *circa* 1650. More specifically, Welch saw it as the product of a court artist in Golconda, where the Qutbshahi dynasty ruled until the Mughal conquest in 1687. The two comparable signed and dated examples, unknown to Welch at the time of writing, show that their painter did indeed flourish in the mid-17th century, and the attribution to southern India fits into the pattern of migration of educated Iranians exemplified by the biographies of Mirza Mu'min and his two sons. According to Mirza Sa'ib Tabrizi, 'There is no head wherein the desire for thee dances not, even as the determination to visit India is in every heart.'[14] However, Welch presented no real evidence that the artist responsible for *Two doves in a vernal landscape* worked in India, nor any that he did not work in Iran. This left it open for a second attribution of the painting, proposed by Abolala Soudavar, to Isfahan, and more specifically to an Iranian painter of the 17th century, Bahram Sufrah-kash. Although the attribution to Bahram seems in error, his name is relevant here because he may have been the painting master of Amin.

Bahram Sufrah-kash: Amin's master?

A signed work by Bahram is a portrait of a *Woman in a landscape*, dated AH 1050 (AD 1640–41).[15] Anthony Welch thought the date too early and redated the work to *circa* 1670, suggesting that Bahram was an Iranian artist who was resident in the Deccan at this time but who later returned to Iran. Indeed, he regarded another version of the same portrait as by Bahram after he had returned to his native land.[16] But again he offered no evidence to support these conclusions. A second signed work, a portrait of a *Nobleman in a landscape*, preserved in Bombay, is dated AH 1031 (AD 1621–2),[17] and a third, a painting of *Two lovers* in the Art and History Trust Collection, is dated AH 1050.[18] In the latter the two figures are engaged in an amorous embrace in a setting not unlike that of *Two doves in a vernal landscape*: a broken stump has sprouted a blossoming bough, a large moth hovers above it, and a section of flower-strewn meadow graces the foreground. The tree, the moth and the meadow may well have been drawn after European models,[19] but the figures are of an Indianizing type usually associated with the more famous Shaykh 'Abbasi, whose earliest known work is dated 1647 and who was responsible for cat.12, which is dated AH 1086 (AD 1675–6), and the Indian domestic scene on cat.13. Soudavar therefore suggested that Shaykh was a pupil of Bahram.[20]

If Bahram Sufrah-kash was active in Iran *circa* 1621–41, then perhaps he is to be identified with the Bahram 'Abbasi who signed a painting of a *Woman holding a pear* exhibited in London in 1931:[21] as 'Abbas II only came to the throne in 1642, Bahram may well have used another surname before that date and assumed the honorific 'Abbasi with the Shah's permission some time later.[22] It is also possible that Bahram Sufrah-kash is to be identified

A 'worthless speck of dust'

The identity of Muhammad Amin

The painter who signed cat.18 self-deprecatingly as 'the worthless speck of dust Amin' in AH 1070 (AD 1659–60) was one of at least two painters and calligraphers who had the same name and who used a similar signature recorded as active in Iran and India in the period 1658–1701.[1] The second of the two was a tile-painter known from the decoration of the tilework erected in the western iwan of the Great Mosque of Isfahan in AH 1112 (AD 1700–1). This includes the signature 'the work of the insubstantial speck of dust [*zarrah-yi bī-miqdār*], the son of Muhammad Mu'min, Muhammad Amin Banna' Isfahani',[2] and, in view of the recurrence of the reference to a 'speck of dust', it is possible that the painter of cat.18 and the tile-painter were the same person, although their works bear dates that are 40 years apart and are on such different media.[3]

The tile-painter Mirza Amin also composed verse 'not devoid of a certain grace' under the pen-name Sakit, 'the Silent', and this earned him an entry in the *Tazkirah*, or biographical dictionary of poets, prepared from AH 1083 (AD 1672–3) onwards by Muhammad Tahir Nasrabadi.[4] Nasrabadi's source was the poet's brother, Muhammad Salih Beg, who was resident in Isfahan when he was compiling the *Tazkirah*.[5] Mirza Amin and his brother were the sons of Mirza Mu'min and the grandsons of Khwajah Beg Tabrizi, one of the leading merchants of Tabriz. It seems likely that the family settled in the environs of Isfahan when Shah 'Abbas I transferred the capital there in 1598, for no links with their former home town were recorded. Mirza Mu'min did not remain in the capital but moved to Mashhad with his sons, and at some point, probably after they had come of age, he went to India, where he died, having held a government post 'worth a thousand a year'.

Mirza Amin had returned to Isfahan, presumably in the course of his studies, for while he was there he was awarded his pen-name by the poet Mirza Sa'ib, the greatest Persian lyricist of the 17th century and a man of the same Tabrizi merchant stock as his pupil.[6] At the time that Nasrabadi was writing Mirza Amin, like his father before him, had gone to India, and was living in Bengal, where he was attached to the suite of the governor, Shayistah Khan. His brother Muhammad Salih Beg had come to Isfahan, where he stayed in the house of their maternal uncle Hajj Husayn Zarrabi, but two years before the time of Nasrabadi's writing he had gone to India to visit his brother. On his way back to Isfahan with his stock-in-trade, which consisted mostly of 'Khotan wares', he had been shipwrecked and experienced a series of adventures at sea, which he seems to have had great pleasure in describing to Nasrabadi. Mirza Amin must have returned to Isfahan from India by the end of the 17th century, when he worked on the tiles in the Great Mosque.

If the lacquer-painter Amin and the tile-painter and poet Mirza Amin were the same person, then cat.18, which was produced in 1659 or 1660, could have been painted while Amin was in Isfahan as a student. This hypothesis is supported by a report that cat.18 once enclosed a copy of the poems of Mirza Amin's tutor in poetry, Mirza Sa'ib Tabrizi.[7] But it is equally possible that the lacquer-painter Amin and Mirza Amin, the son of Muhammad Mu'min Tabrizi, were separate individuals, and that some familiar literary or religious reference led them to use the same formula in their signatures.[8] The poetic figure of the speck of dust, which, despite its lack of substance, strives to rise to the sun was certainly a common one in Persian poetry.[9] Indeed, the manuscript that cat.18 reportedly enclosed may have included Mirza Sa'ib's line, 'From the insignificance of dust on top of the wall I concluded that a nobody does not become a somebody by sitting in high places.'[10]

Other works of the lacquer-painter Amin

Two or three other works by the Amin who painted cat.18 can be identified. One is an unpublished flower study in an album in the Royal Library in Windsor Castle that was signed by Amin and dated AH 1069 (AD 1658–9).[11] It formed the basis of the attribution of a third work, an unsigned and undated flower-and-bird composition in the collection of Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan,[12] to the same artist. This attribution is confirmed by the striking



17



17 lid and base

17

Pen box
Isfahan, *circa* 1660

Boxwood body and lift-off lid with rounded ends, 25.5 × 4.5 × 3.5 cm. The decoration is signed, 'He! Painted by the humble Mu'in Musavvir.'
accession no. LAQ I
published Drouot Rive Gauche, Paris, 9–10 October 1977, lot no. 223

The natural light-brown colour of the wood has been used as a ground for the finely painted decoration. The lid bears three separate sprays of flowers, all outlined in gold, with clouds, birds and butterflies between them; it is edged with a band of gold scroll-work on black. Similar designs appear on the sides, but here the use of gold is confined to a few touches.

The base bears a series of five medallions of different shapes. All five have black grounds, with gold scroll-work decoration in four; the largest, in the centre, contains a bird in a tree.

1. Kühnel 1942, p.109; Stchoukine 1964, p.62; Anthony Welch 1973, pp.147–8; Farhad 1990, p.114.
2. Kühnel 1942; Stchoukine 1964, pp.62–72; Anthony Welch 1973, nos 56, 57, 75–9, 85; Farhad 1990; Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, III, pp.1174–99.
3. See Farhad 1990, p.114, n.10 (on pp.126–7), where five copies produced between the 1630s and the 1660s are listed. The last of these, dated AH 1077 (AD 1666–7), is represented by eight miniatures in the Khalili Collection (MSS835.1–4, MSS924.1–4; Grube 1972, nos 163, 164, 166–9, 171, 172).
4. Farhad 1990, p.114, n.11 (on p.127), amended in the light of Soudavar 1992, pp.290–91. The dispersed copy that has been dated *circa* 1688 (Soudavar 1992, p.290) is the source of two miniatures in the Khalili Collection (MSS458, MSS462). For the history in question, see Storey 1927–53, part I, section II, no.376.
5. The *Khamsah* pages in the Khalili Collection are MSS843 and MSS919; see Grube 1972, nos 161 and 162, respectively.
6. Rypka 1968, p.300.
7. Welch & Welch 1982, no.41; Soudavar 1992, fig.39 (on p.262).
8. Kühnel 1942, fig.3.
9. Richter 1989, p.23.
10. On boxwood in Iran, see A'lam 1990.
11. A second link with bookbinder's lacquer is the framing band filled with a conventional gold-on-black design; see p.17, and note 59, on p.21, above.
12. Neumann & Murza 1988, no.90, and pl.105; Paris 1989, no.82. *Cf.* Paris 1989, no.83, and the border published by Anthony Welch (1973, no.24).
13. By Olivia Pelletier (Paris 1989, p.109).
14. Ackerman 1938–9, pp.2131–3.
15. Especially Gray 1959, fig.D.
16. It has been claimed that Shafi' was the son of Riza 'Abbasi (Sarre & Mittwoch 1914, p.13; Schulz 1914, I, p.195; Kühnel 1938–9, p.1894; Stchoukine 1964, pp.79–80). The evidence for this comes from inscriptions on Riza's work. For example, a drawing signed by Riza and dated Saturday, 4 Safar 1044 (30 July 1634) is dedicated to Muhammad Shafi', whom Riza described as *a'azzī-yi farzandī*, a phrase derived from *a'azz*, 'dearest', and *farzand*, 'son' (Pal 1973, no.237). But there is reason to doubt this interpretation (see also Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, I, pp.243–6, no.472). Firstly, Riza used the same words in referring to other dedicatees of his drawings, such as the Muhammad Baqir for whom a drawing in an album in St Petersburg was made (Oriental Institute, MS.D–181, folio 10; Akimushkin & Ivanov 1968, no.64). It is possible that Muhammad Baqir was also a son of Riza, but it seems more likely that Riza was merely indicating that the man in question was a younger acquaintance. Secondly, Shafi' did not refer to Riza as his father in any of his signatures, whereas his own son signed himself Muhammad Taqi ibn Shafi' 'Abbasi (Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.676). Thirdly, when Shafi' did mention Riza, as on a sketch made by the older artist in 1619 that Shafi' coloured in 1654, he called him simply 'the late Aqa Riza' (Robinson 1976b, no.III.387). It would therefore appear that the relationship between Riza and Shafi' was that of master and pupil, and that the words used to describe Shafi' were terms of endearment, not a statement of kinship. That is, if the inscription referred to Muhammad Shafi' the artist, which has been denied (Akimushkin & Ivanov 1968, p.31).
17. Ackerman 1938–9, p.2151; Kühnel 1942, p.114.
18. See, for example, Anthony Welch 1973, nos 11 (signed Riza 'Abbasi), 58 (signed Shafi' 'Abbasi, 1651–52) and 79 (signed Mu'in Musavvir, 1689–90).
19. Ackerman & Upton 1938–9, pl.1477; Boguslavsky 1958, pls 103–7; Goncharova *et al.* 1969, pl.133. *Cf.* Anthony Welch 1973, no.50 (signed Riza 'Abbasi, 1629), in which the coat worn by the servant is decorated with a non-repeating design composed of small birds, clouds and vegetation.
20. For the other two, see Ackerman & Upton 1938–9, pl.1478a; Boguslavsky 1958, pls 95, 96; Goncharova *et al.* 1969, pl.132. The first is probably that presented by Shah 'Abbas I to Boris Godunov, and the second has been associated with Mikhail Romanov.
21. These mix Christian iconography with subjects drawn from the Persian literary repertory: they show merrymaking in mixed company, with wine and music; the expulsion from Eden, with Adam and Eve in skirts of leaves; workers in the fields, a theme no doubt connected with the Labours of the Months; and a hunting scene. See Boguslavsky 1958, pls 104–7.
22. This type of bird also occurs on a small lacquer tray dated AH 1108 (AD 1696–7; Edinburgh, National Museums of Scotland, inv.no.1894.417; Robinson 1986, p.4; Scarce 1995, pp.64–5, fig.2). The main scene on the tray – *Yusuf appears before the women of Memphis*, from the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha – is in Mu'in's figural style but is set against a gold ground. It also contains the bands of gold-on-black ornament that frame the decoration on the pen box and the throne, but here they are used for the supports of Zulaykha's pavilion rather than as a border: this function was taken over by a wide frame of naturalistic floral motifs on a solid coloured ground, in a manner associated with the school of Muhammad Zaman – work that is the very antithesis of the style of decoration seen on cat.17. (We are grateful to Jennifer Scarce for providing us with information on this tray.)

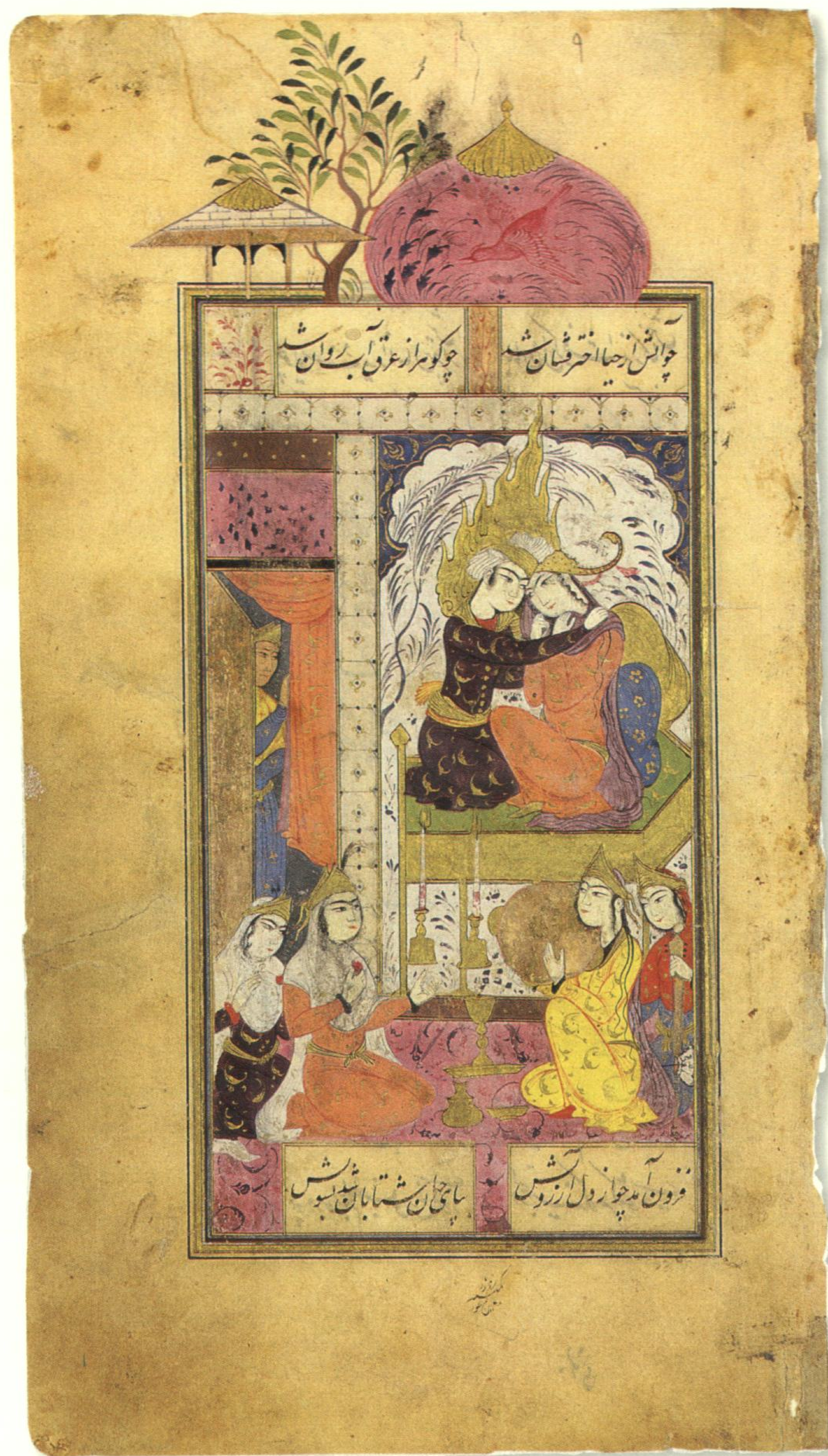


Fig. 4
Mu'in Musavvir, *Yusuf entertained by Zulaykha*, from a *Khamsah* of Nizami, Isfahan, late 17th century; 18.2 × 7.2 cm; Khalili Collection, MSS919

on two different scales suggests that Mu'in combined elements of two different designs without altering their relative sizes.

Another example of painted woodwork that can be related to cat. 17 forms part of the eclectic decoration of the Diamond Throne in the Moscow Kremlin.[19] The throne is the latest in a series of three made in Isfahan in the 17th century for presentation to Godunov and Romanov tsars by the Armenian company of the city.[20] Completed in 1659 and given to Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich in April 1660, this extraordinary object consists of a wooden chair of a European type with many of its surfaces encased in gold and silver plaques. These are richly decorated in a variety of techniques and set with precious stones, including the more than 800 diamonds that have given the throne its name. The less prominent woodwork was left unclad, and some was covered instead with painted-and-varnished figural scenes on a natural ground.[21] Some elements, including the main figures, were rendered in line and colour, while others are in colour and gold outline, and the edges of the wooden bars are painted with a gold-on-black border of the same type as appears on the sides of the pen box. The style of painting is that of Mu'in, and the figures reside in landscapes populated by the same type of charming but unclassifiable birds as appear on cat. 17.[22]

Taken together, the pen box of Mu'in Musavvir and the painted sections of the Diamond Throne suggest that there existed in 17th-century Isfahan a distinctive style of painted woodwork in which the motifs were applied to the natural ground of the wood, in a manner that can be associated with contemporary single-leaf miniature paintings. The subject-matter was drawn from the wide range of decorative and figural work practised by the school of Riza 'Abbasi, and the effect was heightened by gold outlines and gold-on-black borders, which may have been borrowed from bookbinder's lacquer. But the triumph of the school of Muhammad Zaman after 1700 marked the demise of this elegant style of decoration.

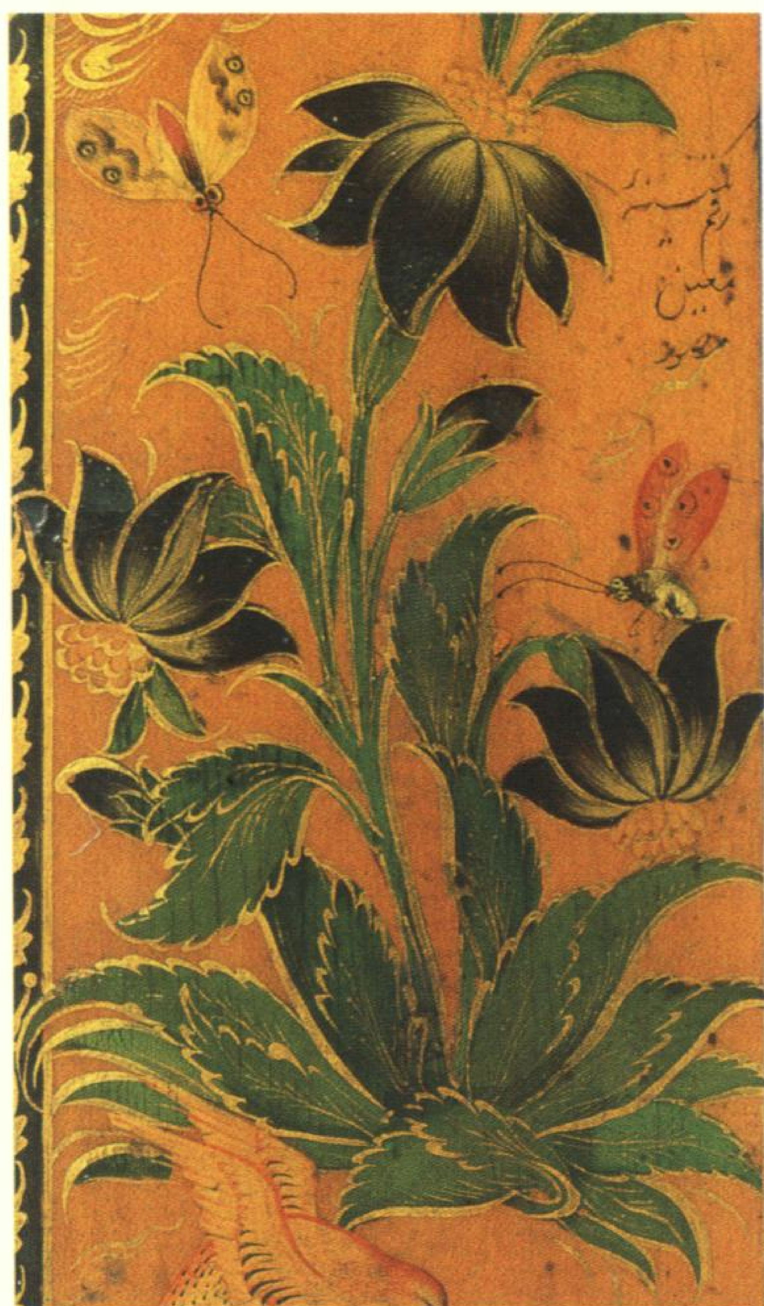
the seated physician. These include a pen box decorated with a design similar to that on the base of the pen box signed by Mu'in: a series of cartouches with a black ground set in a row against a reddish-brown field. A pen box of this type is also shown set before the main figure in *Mirza Muhammad Baqir and his son*, a work that Mu'in painted in the same year, 1674.[8] It may be that, in decorating the base of cat.17, Mu'in, or an assistant, used a design traditionally employed by craftsmen producing pen boxes (compare the underside of the lid of cat.16), whereas the upper faces of cat.17 were decorated in a style that can be related to the single-leaf work of figure-painters such as Mu'in, to lacquer bookbindings, and to the designs used for contemporary textiles.

The strongest parallel between the pen box and Mu'in's single-leaf work is the use of the natural colour of the wood as the background for the designs, in the same way that the natural colour of the paper was used in the paintings. To judge by its delicate yellow colour and fine, uniform grain, the wood that Mu'in chose as his medium appears to be boxwood, and, although papier mâché is an ideal material for thin-bodied containers such as pen boxes, 'since, once dry, it does not warp as wood does',[9] this type of wood has a dense structure that makes it an attractive medium for the creation of thin-bodied wooden wares such as cat.17. Certainly its use in this instance has been justified by the survival of the item in good condition.[10] The designs set against this natural ground are not related to the main, figural, subject-matter of Mu'in's single-leaf works, but they do have a connection with the isolated secondary motifs he employed, for the box is decorated with a combination of flowers, birds and insects.

Combinations of these same elements were a standard theme on bookbinder's lacquer of the 17th century and later, but the presentation of the subject-matter on cat.17 is quite unlike that seen on the lacquer examples. The isolated flowering plants that form the dominant element fit elegantly on to the sides of the box, but those on the lid are arranged in an awkward vertical composition, with undersized birds between them. This suggests that the decoration of the pen box was experimental, for later lacquer-painters generally created more coherent, horizontally disposed flower-and-bird compositions for the lids of pen boxes. The techniques employed in executing the motifs also vary in an unusual way, and the scaling of the different motifs on the lid is not uniform. The small birds and the insects were rendered in line and colour, as were the flowers on the sides, while the floral motifs and clouds on the lid were outlined in gold, in the manner associated with the pseudo-*tianqi* decoration of figural lacquer bookbindings. However, on the bookbindings the line-and-colour technique was used for the principal elements in the design, while the gold-outline work was confined to background motifs.[11]

Compositions of the type found on cat.17 were also worked up into designs for textiles. Two fine silk velvets in Berlin and Lyon, for example, are decorated with a combination of sprays of flowers (in this case, tulips), tiny clouds and butterflies, worked in black outline and colours on a gold ground.[12] The name of Shafi' 'Abbasi has been mentioned in connection with the Lyon example,[13] presumably on the basis of the attributions made by Phyllis Ackerman.[14] An album published by Basil Gray contains a whole series of 17th-century botanical drawings of a more or less realistic character, a number of which were signed by Shafi', and some of these studies are very close to the designs on the pen box by Mu'in.[15] As Shafi' 'Abbasi was also a student of Riza 'Abbasi,[16] he must have received a very similar training to Mu'in, and, on the evidence of the pen box, the Berlin and Lyon textiles could be as easily attributed to Mu'in as to Shafi'. Indeed, the involvement of Mu'in in the production of textiles has already been proposed, on the basis of a 17th-century silk decorated with a red rose and a cluster of violets on a gold ground and apparently signed 'Mu'in'.[17] Bird studies were also executed by this group of artists,[18] but these tend to show a single bird of an identifiable type, while the birds on the Khalili pen box are generic. Moreover, they are the same size as the insects on the lid, and this juxtaposition of motifs worked out

The painted woodwork of Mu'in Musavvir



17 detail of lid

For two centuries after the initial development of bookbinder's lacquer, in the second half of the 15th century, the technique was primarily used for the production of bookbindings. During this period, however, other forms made their appearance. These included the lacquer pen box, which by the early 18th century had evolved into an important but relatively standardized art form associated with the school of Muhammad Zaman (see pp.54–7, below). In the years leading up to this development, however, there was greater diversity in pen box production, as is shown by a group of three examples in the Khalili Collection, cat.15–17. These were decorated with a wide range of ornamental motifs that do not appear in the work of Muhammad Zaman and his school, and only cat.16 has a body made of papier mâché, the base material of bookbinder's lacquer: cat.15 is made of leather over papier mâché, and cat.17 is made of wood.

Cat.17 is of particular interest, as it was signed by Mu'in Musavvir, a celebrated painter who was active at Isfahan between the 1630s and the 1690s or perhaps even later.[1] Mu'in's principal role was that of a figure-painter (*muṣavvir*), producing manuscript illustrations and single-leaf paintings and drawings in considerable numbers,[2] and cat.17 appears to be the only pen box he decorated, although at least one other example of painted-and-varnished woodwork can be associated with him on the basis of this single signed work.

Mu'in Musavvir was a pupil of Riza 'Abbasi, whose style he perpetuated in the face of the Europeanizing and Indianizing trends that came to dominate Iranian painting in the course of his life. His work as an illustrator of manuscripts is known principally from copies of the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsi,[3] but he also worked on at least three copies of a history of Shah Isma'il I,[4] and one of the *Khamsah* of Nizami (fig.4).[5] These illustrations preserve the conventions of Islamic miniature painting to a large degree, although the colours used, including Mu'in's favourite pinks, mauves and purples, are typical of the 17th-century Isfahan school. Another striking feature is the air of abstracted calm that characterizes his figures, even those involved in the most dramatic situations. This emotional distance was usual in Islamic book-painting, but it is emphasized in Mu'in's work by the relatively large scale of the figures in many examples.

In the tradition Mu'in inherited from Riza 'Abbasi, single-leaf paintings consisted primarily of portraits of contemporary types or named individuals. The main figure and a limited number of props, such as the cushions on which a lady reclines or the wine jar a youth holds, were rendered in the combination of line and colour also used in manuscript illustrations. But whereas in such illustrations the same technique was used to fill the background with a landscape, palace interior or other setting, in single-leaf works the main figure was set against the natural hue of the paper. This neutral background was often enhanced with a limited repertory of motifs, executed in gold or, more rarely, in colour – saplings of willow and poplar, an electrically charged cloud, tussocks suggestive of a flower-strewn meadow. The same motifs appear in the backgrounds of Mu'in's drawings, but in ink, and, on the evidence of his manuscript illustrations, it seems that they were also among those executed in colour on a white ground in contemporary wall-paintings, which, for all we know, Mu'in may have had a hand in creating (fig.4).

Another notable feature of many of Mu'in's single-leaf works, whether paintings or drawings, is the long inscriptions he added in a rangy hand. These offer useful information on Mu'in's way of working and other matters, information that is all the more valuable as there are no narrative sources for the artist's life. For example, his portrait of *Hakim Shifa'i*, physician and poet at the court of Shah 'Abbas I,[6] was completed on 15 Muharram 1085 (21 April 1674) and was made after an original executed by Riza in AH 1044 (AD 1634–5).[7] In other cases, however, the signature is short and relatively uninformative, and it is in this manner that Mu'in signed the pen box in the Khalili Collection, in his characteristic hand. When Mu'in copied the work of an earlier artist, he would vary the details, and it is notable that in *Hakim Shifa'i* he placed a number of writing implements in front of



16

16

Pen box
Isfahan, first half of the 17th century

Papier-mâché body and hinged lid with rounded ends, 36.5 × 9.5 × 7.5 cm, with metal hinges, hasp and chains
accession no. LAQ360

This pen box is distinguished by its size and its fine but restrained decoration. The exterior has been painted light brown and covered all over with swirling gold lines, which probably represent wood grain; the same pattern appears on the underside of cat.10 and on a pair of doors from Isfahan that are probably of 17th-century date.[1] The wood-grained areas are contained within narrow borders of black with fine gold floral scrolls.

The interior of the lid has a lobed medallion with double pendants, decorated with stylized flowering plants in black on a white ground, turned greenish-black and cream respectively by the varnish. The dark-brown background has been stippled with a darker shade of brown to simulate the texture of leather and painted with floral scrolls in gold. The interior of the box is black, and the base is red, with formal floral designs in gold.

1. Detroit, Institute of Arts, acc.no.26.7; see Grube 1981, p.291.



15 design on sides and top



15

15

Pen box
Isfahan, late 16th or early 17th century

Leather-covered papier-mâché body and hinged lid with rounded ends, 32.4 × 7.5 × 6 cm, with metal hasp, hinges, and rings for chains
accession no. LAQ295

The design, which shows a variety of animals, birds and trees on a black ground, was executed in low relief and has been badly rubbed.

The technique used in the decoration of this pen box was probably related to one described by Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi.[1] In this technique, which Karimzadeh called *lāyah-yi chīnī* ('residue of China'), the design was drawn on the surface to be decorated, and 'a special paste' mixed with grape syrup was applied with a brush over the design. When it was dry, the process was repeated, and this continued until the required depth had been achieved. The surface was sanded with emery, to correct any irregularities, painted, and then varnished with *rawghan-i kamān.*

According to Karimzadeh Tabrizi, this technique was invented in the Timurid period and used in the manufacture of bindings until the late Safavid period, when an example in his possession was made by Muhammad Rahim, *circa* 1708–9. However, the type of relief work seen in Timurid and early Safavid bindings[2] was created by moulding leather under pressure, and the paste had only a secondary role.[3]

1. Karimzadeh Tabrizi 1985–91, II, p.667.
2. See James 1992, no.43, for example.
3. Raby & Tanındı 1993, p.216, and fig.88.

13
Mirror case with shutter
Iran, *circa* 1675 and later

Rectangular papier-mâché case, 13.4 × 8.1 cm, and hinged shutter, 12 × 6.7 cm; silver hinges and hasp
accession no. LAQ142
published Sotheby's, London, 1 June 1987, lot no. 47

This mirror case was assembled using three fine 17th-century miniatures. The Indian domestic scene on the outer face of the shutter is very probably the work of Shaykh 'Abbasi (compare cat. 12): a couple are engaged in conversation on a balcony, with a serving woman in attendance. Delicately rendered grass and flowers suggest that a garden occupied the foreground, while a group of buildings and trees and lines of flying birds in the sky above the figures allude to the world beyond. Traces of what may have been a signature in the top right-hand corner are too defaced to read.

On the inside of the shutter a bust of an Iranian youth in a fur-edged cap is set in an illuminated surround, while the miniature on the back of the case shows a Deccani prince seated on a rock, under a blossoming tree. He holds a closed book in his left hand and a handkerchief in his right.


13 back of case and outer face of shutter

14
Portrait pendant
Isfahan, third quarter of the 17th century

Miniature set in a carved ivory case, 8 × 4.7 cm
accession no. LAQ2

The ivory case is in two parts. One acts as a sliding cover, which opens on a pivot to reveal a bust portrait of Shah 'Abbas II. The cover is carved in low relief in the form of a spray of three flowers partially enclosed within a disc, which has been set with a smaller disc of painted lacquer at its centre.

Such pendants were often worn by loyal wives in veneration of their husbands, and it is therefore possible that this pendant was originally carried by a member of 'Abbas II's seraglio.


14



12 outer cover

12

Book cover
Iran, after AH 1086 (AD 1675–6)

Papier-mâché board with leather trim and paper doublure, 19.8 × 15.4 cm. The decoration is inscribed, 'Shaykh acquired value when he became an *'abbāsī.'*
accession no. LAQ140
published Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 2 October 1986, lot no. 409

A fine miniature, depicting a nobleman wearing a Shah 'Abbas moustache and standing in a landscape, has been pasted to the outer face of the board and varnished. It is surrounded by a border of reddish-brown leather. The doublure has been painted black and ruled in gold with a frame design. The miniature is dated AH 1086 (AD 1675–6), but the binding may have been assembled at a later date; in the process the painting was cut down, as is shown by the loss of the nobleman's feet.

As was his wont, Shaykh 'Abbasi signed the painting within a cartouche, on the natural ground of the paper, employing the phrase, *Bahā girift chu gardīd Shaykh 'abbāsī* ('Shaykh acquired value when he became an *'abbāsī'*). A pun was intended, as an *'abbāsī* was both a gold coin of the period and the honorific surname that indicated Shaykh's personal attachment to Shah 'Abbas II, who ruled between 1642 and 1666.[1]

Shaykh 'Abbasi's dated work covers the period 1647 to 1684,[2] and he appears to have been a pioneer of the eclectic style that came to fruition in the work of 'Aliquli Jabadar and Muhammad Zaman ibn Hajji Yusuf. He introduced Indian themes (see cat. 13, for example), and also adopted European conventions, such as the use of shading to achieve a sense of volume, in imitation of Western prints.

Shaykh replaced the violent shades favoured by the school of Riza 'Abbasi with gentle tones, used so sparingly that much of the ground was left uncoloured. In later works, such as cat. 12, he drew on Western prints rather than the Iranian tradition of decorative painting for the background motifs, which often consisted of landscapes with towns or scattered buildings, and wooded hills.

Adle recorded an undated pen box in a private collection in Paris, which has a standing figure on the lid, and which he attributed to Shaykh 'Abbasi.[3]

1. But compare Soudavar 1992, p. 368.
2. Skelton 1985; Soudavar 1992, no. 146.
3. Adle 1980, n. 165, on p. 66.



11 outer covers

11

Pair of book covers
Iran, early 17th century

Papier-mâché boards, each
24 × 16.3 cm, with leather doublures
accession no. LAQ315

The outer covers bear a rich design of dragons, clouds, scrolls and other motifs, executed in gold and colours on a greenish-brown ground, and framed within a wide border with panels of gold floral scrolls on a black ground. The central medallion contains a scene of animals in combat and a phoenix, also painted in gold on a black background.

The doublures are of brown leather and have sunken medallions, pendants and corner-pieces decorated with leather filigree in gold on blue.



10

10

Panel, probably from a casket
Iran, mid-17th century

Wooden board, 23.5 × 37.5 cm
accession no. LAQ138
published Sarre 1923, pl.XXXI

A prince is shown seated under a blossoming tree, with two courtiers, two attendants and a group of musicians. The colour of the ground was originally gold, but the varnish has darkened it to a deep-brown. The scene is framed by a band of gold scrollwork on black.

The reverse, which has suffered considerable damage, is decorated with a central medallion and pendants, corner-pieces and a frame, all in black with gold and silver scrollwork. The background is painted in imitation of wood grain (compare cat.16).

7

Door panel
Isfahan, 1590s

Pear-wood board, 26.1 × 29 cm, the painted area 15.6 × 18.5 cm
accession no. LAQ491

The scene depicts two youths, wearing an early form of the 'Shah 'Abbas turban', seated among flowering shrubs, with a dish of fruit and a decanter between them. It can be compared to an album painting of a seated youth attributed to Sadiq Beg, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.[1]

1. MS.suppl. pers.1171, folio 2; Stchoukine 1964, pl.XXVI.

8

Two panels, probably from a door
Isfahan, second quarter of the 17th century

Wooden boards, each 12.2 × 12.5 cm
accession no. LAQ139

On each panel a young couple are depicted in the style of Riza 'Abbasi. On one a young man carrying two wine bottles leads a young woman towards their trysting place, while she casts coquettish glances in his direction. On the other a young woman dances, watched by her male companion, who is seated and holds up a cup of wine. The figures stand against a black ground, among trees outlined in gold. The scenes are framed within black borders decorated with scrolling gold leaves.

9

Flap from a book cover
Isfahan, mid-17th century

Papier-mâché board, 26.5 × 8.3 cm, with a leather spine and doublure
accession no. LAQ513

This fragment of a lacquer binding displays the same type of subject matter as the examples of woodwork, cat.7, 8 and 10. A little stream runs through a landscape set with a tree, plants and clouds, all outlined in gold on a wine-red ground. Above the stream stands a youth clasping a blue-and-white wine jug, while below it a young dervish is seated with an open book and a gourd bottle before him. The book bears an Arabic inscription, 'There is nothing worse for human beings than the consumption of more food once one has eaten.' The black-and-gold border contains panels with more Arabic inscriptions in elegant *nasta'līq* script, including, along the bottom, 'Knowledge comes in two forms: the knowledge of bodies and the knowledge of religions', and, along the top, 'All medical skill lies in addressing the two causes of distress …'. It seems from these that the flap was once attached to a medical manuscript, and it should therefore be compared with the binding of a copy of the *Canon* of Avicenna in the Wellcome Institute, London.[1]

The spine and the doublure are of plain red leather.

1. Fehérvári 1984, p.155.



9



7



8



8



6 outer cover



6 outer cover



5 lower cover and flap

5

Binding of a *Dīvān* of Nava'i
Probably Herat, mid-16th century

Papier-mâché boards, each
24.1 × 15.8 cm, flap 24.1 × 8.4 cm,
with leather doublures
accession no. MSS948
published Christie's, London,
20 October 1992, lot no. 283

This binding is attached to a copy of the *Dīvān* of Nava'i that was produced in Herat in the mid-16th century, and it appears to be contemporary with the manuscript.

The outer covers are decorated with fantastic landscapes populated by a variety of Sino-Islamic beasts. These include ducks flying in a cloud-streaked sky, fish swimming in pools, phoenixes (or simurghs), tigers attacking deer, *qilins*, jackals, and a dragon in combat with a phoenix. All the motifs were finely executed and outlined in gold on a dark-maroon ground, within narrow frames of floral scrollwork.

The doublures are of reddish-brown leather and have lobed medallions, pendants and corner-pieces of gilt leather filigree on blue and green grounds.

6

Pair of book covers
Perhaps Mashhad, mid-16th century

Papier-mâché boards, each 30 × 21 cm,
with leather doublures
accession no. LAQ288

These covers show a princely picnic in a luxuriant landscape, executed in colour against a black ground. The trees, rocks, birds and other secondary elements in the design are outlined in gold. The figures are reminiscent of the style current in Mashhad in the 1550s and 1560s, under the patronage of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza. The faces of some figures have been retouched, however, and an attempt has been made to erase the batons in their turbans.

The doublures are decorated with rectangular panels of leather filigree on a mid-blue ground, which are surrounded by two rows of gilt cartouches with stamped and tooled decoration; the cartouches in the outer row have been replaced.



5 upper cover



4 lower cover and flap



3 outer covers

3

Pair of book covers
Perhaps Istanbul, 1540s or 1550s

Papier-mâché boards, each 13.7 × 7 cm, with leather doublures
accession no. LAQ467

The decoration of the outer covers can be compared with that of a fine lacquer binding in the Topkapı Palace Library, produced in Istanbul about 1540.[1] The covers are painted predominantly in gold on black, the design consisting of an arabesque medallion and double pendants on a background filled with a conventional floral pattern, all set within a frame of arabesque scrollwork, in black on gold. The doublures are of faded red leather, with a central medallion, pendants and corner-pieces, rather roughly executed in gold.

Affixed to the binding is the book plate of 'Jph. A. Cattaui Pacha', with a design of a lady of ancient Egypt reading a papyrus scroll.

1. MS.E.H.2851; see Atıl 1987, no.18.

4

Binding of a *Būstān* manuscript
Probably Istanbul, 1530s

Papier-mâché boards, each 24.7 × 16.5 cm, flap and fore-edge 24.7 × 11 cm, with paper doublures
accession no. MSS712
exhibited New York 1940; Geneva 1995
published Geneva 1995, no.152

These covers are attached to a copy of the *Būstān* of Sa'di that was produced in Tabriz and completed on 15 Sha'ban 936 (12 April 1530). However, the text is preceded by a fine miniature in the style current in Istanbul at this time, and it seems likely that the manuscript was taken there before being illuminated and bound. An all but identical binding in the Topkapı Palace Library has been attributed to Tabrizi artists working in Istanbul in the 1520s.[1]

On the outer covers a central medallion and pendants are surrounded by very fine arabesque scrollwork on a black ground. The central medallion contains cloud scrolls, with a flying duck in the middle. The fore-edge section of the flap bears a verse inscription, 'O you who are desirous of merit and virtue in the world! You should know that the *Būstān* of Shaykh Sa'di is better than a hundred treasures!'

The paper doublures are pale green, with medallions and pendants in gold surrounded by light floral scrollwork sketched in gold. The Topkapı Palace binding also has paper doublures, but these are orange and are set with a centre- and corner-pieces painted in gold on black.

1. MS.H.983; see Tanındı 1984, pp.225–6, and fig.5.



2

2

Book cover
Perhaps Herat, first half of the 16th century

Papier-mâché board, 30.3 × 16.2 cm, reset within a later leather binding, 33.6 × 19.8 cm
accession no. LAQ137

The black ground is covered with fine gold arabesques, and the main elements of the design are sunken and gilded. These include the central medallion and pendants, the corner-pieces, and the pairs of cartouches above and below the main composition. The cartouches contain two Persian couplets in *nasta'līq* script, which indicate that the cover was once attached to a copy of the *Khamsah*, or 'Five Tales', of Nizami. They read, 'Nizami, that sweet-palated pearl-diver for words, by whom the laws of rhetoric were brought to perfection, got the better of the eloquent with his *Khamsah*; in short, through him the structure of verse was put in order.'

This type of binding originated in Herat in the last quarter of the 15th century, and the technical quality of cat. 2 is comparable with that of the Herat originals, notably the outer covers of MS. 1905 in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul, which dates from the 1480s.[1] However, its design lacks the freedom and movement of the Istanbul binding, which suggests a dating to the first half of the 16th century. By this time many artists from Herat had moved to other centres in Iran and beyond, and cat. 2 may have been produced elsewhere.

1. Aga-Oglu 1935, pl. x. See also p. 17, note 57, above.



1 lower cover

1

Binding of a Qur'an
Herat, 1480s or 1490s

Papier-mâché boards, each
17.5 × 11.7 cm, with leather and
paper doublures
accession no. QUR323
published James 1992, pp.114–17

These late 15th-century covers, which are among the earliest examples of bookbinder's lacquer, are attached to a Qur'an manuscript of the same period. They are painted predominantly in gold on a black ground. The centre- and corner-pieces are outlined with a gold band decorated with a repeating Chinese cloud design in black; the same band was used for the border, and the motif recurs in the pendants. The main field is covered with a conventional floral scroll pattern, which is overlaid with another scroll, characterized by feathery lotus blossoms. This is in turn overlaid with a pattern of elongated Chinese clouds. The centre- and corner-pieces are also filled with a conventional floral scroll, and this is overlaid with a second scroll, which bears half-palmettes.

The doublures have mid-blue centre- and corner-pieces that bear the traces of black leather filigree designs. These are set in a burgundy leather field elegantly painted with floral scrolls in gold, work that David James has compared with the lower doublure of a Herat binding of the 1480s.[1] The composition is surrounded by a frame of illumination on paper, in the same style as the decoration of the manuscript.

1. Istanbul, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, MS.1905; Aga-Oglu 1935, pl.XII.

36. One of Timur's successors, Khalil (d. 1409), returned the Chinese envoys detained by his grandfather since 1395 and 1397, while Shahrukh (d. 1447), who was Ulughbeg's father, received regular embassies from the Yongle emperor, as did Ulughbeg in Samarqand; see Bretschneider 1888, II, pp.256–63, 278–85; Thackston 1989, pp.279–97; Crowe 1992, pp.168–9, quoting the work of Morris Rossabi.
37. Figgess 1966, pls 29, 30, 32.
38. Figgess 1966, pls 29–32.
39. This has been associated with Baba Nakkaş, the head of Sultan Mehmed's atelier (see Raby & Tanındı 1993, p.54 and fig.55).
40. Atasoy & Raby 1989, pp.76–81.
41. Melikian-Chirvani 1988, especially pp.99–103.
42. Chardin–Lloyd, p.270.
43. Balfour 1890, pl.IV, reproduced in Klopsteg 1987 (p.16). See also Klopsteg 1987, pp.36–52; T'an 1981, pp.172–5.
44. Quoted in Contadini 1989, p.241, n.35.
45. See Part Two, 'The lacquer pen box'.
46. Thévenot–Lovell, II, p.87.
47. Çığ 1972, p.33 and figs 6–11. Turkish examples from the period 1465–85 associated with Sultan Bayezid II also have painted-and-varnished ornament (Çığ 1970, pp.245–6; Atasoy 1981, p.303), but these were decorated in this fashion at a later date.
48. Chardin–Lloyd, p.270.
49. See, for example, Lentz & Lowry 1989, pp.159–232; Raby & Tanındı 1993, p.17 (*cf.* also pp.54–9).
50. According to the contemporary historian Khwandamir, Mirak Naqqash died during Muhammad Khan Shaybani's invasion of Khurasan, in 1507 (Arnold 1928, p.139; Thackston 1989, p.225).
51. Topkapı Palace Library, MS.H.2154.
52. Bayani 1345–58, I, pp.199–200. The translation is based on that made by Thackston (1989, p.347). *Cf.* Melikian-Chirvani 1988, p.102.
53. Chester Beatty Library, MS.155; see James 1981a, p.318, and pl.I; James 1981b, fig.5. The lacquer covers have been sliced off the original boards and stuck to a new binding. In the process the old doublures were discarded: the binding is now lined with paper sprinkled with gold.
54. Figgess 1966, pl.33; Garner 1979, p.160 and fig.104.
55. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Library, MS.H.676; see Aslanapa 1979, pls XVII (wrongly recorded as outside of upper cover), XVIII (wrongly recorded as outside of lower cover); Brend 1989, fig.15; Diba 1989a, fig.1. *Cf.* Topkapı Palace Library, MS.A.1933 (see p.233 below); and a binding attached to a copy of the *Haft Awrang* of Jami completed in Sha'ban 899 (May–June 1494; Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1 July 1991, lot no.291).
56. Topkapı Palace Library, MS.E.H.1636; Karatay 1961b, no.2307; Aslanapa 1979, fig.29 (upside down); Tanındı 1984, fig.2.
57. Istanbul, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, MS.1905; Aga-Oglu 1935, pls X (upside down), XI, XII; Dimand & Bailey 1973, fig.35; Aslanapa 1979, pls XIII, XIV (upside down); Brend 1989, fig.14; Lentz & Lowry 1989, no.99, illustrated on pp.198–9, 295 (latter upside down).
58. Gratzl 1938–9, pl.980, also in Stead 1974, fig.20; Sakisian 1934, fig.13; Christie's, London, 18 October 1994, lot no.98; Tanındı 1984, figs 6, 8. For more disparate examples, see Tanındı 1984, figs 9, 11, 12.
59. The alternative was a band filled with a conventional design executed in gold on black (see cat.5, 6).
60. Dimand & Bailey 1973, pp.34, 46; Stead 1974, p.26, and fig.12; Aslanapa 1979, p.91, n.8; Fehérvári 1984, p.154.
61. The lacquer doublures of the *Hasht Bihisht* binding of 1496–7 also provide parallels with the central figures on the carpets. For example, the borders of the doublures have polychrome arabesque and lotus scrolls on a gold ground, while the central figures on the carpets have the same type of motifs set against a yellow ground. At the same time, an important element in both designs is a curious form of large half-palmette, composed of stems bearing miniature half-palmettes and executed in two colours; see Aslanapa 1979, pl.XVIII.
62. Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. suppl. turc 993; Paris 1977, no.613.
63. Çağman 1978.
64. It is remarkable how many of the 16th-century lacquer bindings in the Topkapı Palace Library in Istanbul are attached to post-Timurid copies of works composed in Herat under Sultan Husayn Mirza (Tanındı 1984).
65. Topkapı Palace Library, MS.E.H.2851; Istanbul 1983, no.E.61; Tanındı 1984, figs 13, 14; Atıl 1987, no.18; Rogers & Ward 1988, no.24.
66. Scott 1984, pp.43–4.
67. Garner 1979, pp.180, 181.
68. Garner 1979, pp.181–4, colour pl.F, pls 127, 128; Scott 1984, p.44.
69. *Cf.* Sarre & Martin 1910, pl.33; Gratzl 1938–9, pp.1984–5, pl.955.
70. Rogers 1983, no.4. *Cf.* Aga-Oglu 1935, fig.11; London 1976, nos 602, 611; Richard 1982.
71. These fruit bear a striking resemblance to the peaches on the *tianqi* cabinet in the Victoria & Albert Museum (see Scott 1984, p.42).
72. Sarre & Martin 1910, no.848, and pl.30; Gratzl 1938–9, pl.126E; London 1976, no.606; Rogers 1983, no.1; Diba 1989a, fig.3.
73. Detroit, Institute of Arts, acc.no.26.7; Fehérvári 1969, no.1; Grube 1981, p.291.

1. On the social significance of the pen box, see Part Two, 'The lacquer pen box'.
2. Pasteboard had been developed many centuries before as a lighter alternative to wood; see Bosch & Petherbridge 1981, pp.56–8.
3. For lacquer bindings that may have been produced in Bukhara, see Gratzl 1938–9, pl.976a; James 1981a, pp.319–20; Christie's, London, 26 April 1994, lot no.62. For Turkey and India, see pp.232–5, below.
4. For example, Karabacek 1913, pp.51–3; Kühnel 1925, p.85; Sakisian 1934, pp.159–60; Aga-Oglu 1935, pp.11–14; Dimand 1963; Aslanapa 1979, pp.63, 64, and n.8 (on p.91).
5. The definition offered by Diba (1989a, p.243: 'small-scale water-colour painting on layered pasted paper, wood or papier-mâché which is then covered with successive layers of transparent varnish') is unusual in being explicit, but it includes painted-and-varnished woodwork.
6. Gratzl 1924, pp.28–9; Gratzl 1938–9, pp.1984–5.
7. William Watson 1981, pp.211–345.
8. Kiani 1981, p.215.
9. Kiani 1981, p.211.
10. Riefstahl 1933, p.361, n.2; Oliver Watson 1981, p.234. Kiani's technical information is totally confused, as he describes *lāk* as 'the sap of a tree', on the basis of a reference in al-Biruni, and then refers to the lac insects as kermes (*qirmiz dānah*), on the basis of a reference in Hamdallah Mustawfi. *Cf.* Fehérvári 1984, p.152.
11. Kiani 1981, p.215.
12. On these, see Garner 1979, pp.19–24.
13. Riefstahl 1933, p.361; Huth 1971, *passim.* The English usage is the result of a concern with the visual effect rather than with the production process, and the same appears to be true of the terminology employed in Muslim sources, which may be said to display a patron-centred attitude to artefacts. The word *munabbat*, for example, was used in Persian to describe any decoration in relief, whether it was achieved by the repoussé technique, if the piece in question was made of metal, or by carving, if it was of stone or wood, or by moulding on a block, if it was of leather (on this last, see Raby & Tanındı 1993, p.13). The emphasis on effect can also be observed in the use of the term *rawghan* for 'lacquer' in Persian and, in the forms *revgan* or *rugan*, in Turkish (see Âli, p.64, for an early example). At first sight this term, *rawghanī*, would appear to have been derived from one of the materials used – *rawghan* in the sense of varnish – rather than from the aesthetic effect. But the primary meaning of *rawghan* is oil or fat, and the extension to mean varnish was due to the oil-like gloss that varnish affords the object to which it is applied. In other words, the use of *rawghan* to mean varnish was itself based on the superficial effect the varnish produces, and *rawghanī* might well be translated as 'glosswork', a term that could be equally applied to Far Eastern lacquer. Indeed, in the early 15th century the Egyptian historian al-Maqrizi used the equivalent Arabic term, *madhūn* (literally, 'oiled'), with reference to Chinese lacquer, as well as to painted-and-varnished woodwork and enamelled metal wares (Karabacek 1913, pp.53–4; *cf.* the use of a verb from the same root as *madhūn* in illuminators' colophons in Mamluk Qur'ans; James 1988, p.67). By contrast, Western art historians (and the Chinese commentators who coined the terms *qiangjin*, 'incised gold', and *tianqi*, 'filled-in lacquer', to be discussed below) have regularly applied a craftsman-centred approach, by concentrating on how effects were created.
14. Riefstahl 1933; Istanbul 1983, no.D.176.
15. For comparable Anatolian Saljuq motifs, see Istanbul 1983, nos D.1–32, D.38–59.
16. Arnold & Grohmann 1929, p.1; Fehérvári 1981, p.227; Istanbul 1983, p.18.
17. See Ertuğ 1991, pp.179–94, for example.
18. This varnishing technique has been linked to the lacquer tradition of the Far East, as well as to ancient Middle Eastern practice, by way of the varnishing of Byzantine icons (Riefstahl 1933, pp.362, 365; Fehérvári 1981, pp.226–7; Oliver Watson 1981, p.243, n.23; Fehérvári 1984, p.153–4).
19. Crowe 1992, pp.172–3, referring to Rawson 1984, fig.141.
20. Karabacek 1913, p.53; al-Maqrizi–Raymond & Wiet, p.204; Rogers 1983, p.154, n.19. The word *madhūn* is rendered here as 'varnished', but it appears that the use of colour was also implied (*cf.* the comments on *rawghan* and *madhūn* above, note 13).
21. Attempts were made to mimic the materials, as when Hajji Muhammad Naqqash, who was active at Herat in the reign of Sultan Husayn Mirza (1470–1506), 'attempted to make porcelain, and after many attempts and much endeavor the vessels he made came extremely close to china' (Khwandamir, in Thackston 1989, p.224).
22. The case was summarized over 80 years ago by Karabacek (1913, p.52).
23. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, inv. no.2/1846; Arseven, no date, pl.11; Grube 1988–9, pp.178–80, figs 21–6, 31, 37, pl.x; Lentz & Lowry 1989, no.49, illustrated on pp.142, 207, 218.
24. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Library, MS.A.1672; Karatay 1962–9, no.8150; Istanbul 1983, no.E.3; Tanındı 1984, fig.1; Tanındı 1991, fig.6, and pl.va; Raby & Tanındı 1993, no.18.
25. Grube 1988–9, pp.179–80.
26. Lentz & Lowry 1989, p.46 and fig.15; Crowe 1992, fig.8.
27. Crowe 1992, pp.173–4.
28. Figgess 1966; Garner 1979, pp.157–8. A seventh example was recorded in a Japanese private collection, and an eighth was moved from Japan to Germany, where it disappeared in the Second World War.
29. Lee & Ho 1968, no.285.
30. Garner 1979, p.157, quoting the *Zhuogeng lu*, published in 1366.
31. The box from the Komyo-bo near Hiroshima is 25.3 cm high, 22.3 cm wide and 39.8 cm long, while the Ulughbeg casket is just over three-quarters the size: it is 19.5 cm high, 17 cm wide and 31.2 cm long.
32. Figgess 1966, pp.39–40; Lee & Ho 1968, no.285.
33. Figgess 1966, pp.39–40, and pl.30a, b; Garner 1979, pp.158, 160, and figs 100–102.
34. Lentz & Lowry 1989, p.218.
35. Garner 1979, p.156.

confined to the background motifs. The same change can be seen on cat.6, where the human figures were painted in line and colour, and the background motifs – the fruit on two of the trees,[71] and the sticks on the fire, for example – were rendered in gold outline.

The solid backgrounds of the early lacquer bindings in the Khalili Collection (cat.1–5) are all black or near-black, but during the 16th century backgrounds of other colours came into use. An early example is a detached binding in the British Museum painted with figural scenes in the style of Tabriz in the second quarter of the 16th century; the ground on the outer covers is black, but the lacquer doublures have hunting scenes on a gold ground.[72] By the 17th century the range of ground colours came to include green, as on cat.11 below, and red, as on cat.9. During later centuries, however, solid coloured grounds of this sort were limited to bindings – or areas on bindings – with non-figural decoration, and figural themes were presented against polychrome backgrounds similar to those of miniature paintings.

It has been argued above that bookbinder's lacquer should be treated as a separate artistic tradition with a separate history. Nevertheless, it is evident that links grew up between bookbinder's lacquer and painted-and-varnished work on a wooden base, not least because the same artists would have decorated both. Several wooden panels in the Khalili Collection dated to the late 16th and the 17th century illustrate the point. Cat.7 and cat.8 have solid black backgrounds, an essential feature of early bookbinder's lacquer, while cat.10 has a solid gold ground. In all cases the main motifs were rendered in the standard colour and line technique, but in cat.8 the background motifs are outlined in gold, in the pseudo-*tianqi* manner. In addition, the reverse of cat.10 has a centre-and-corner composition in the manner of a bookbinding and the main field is covered with the same type of wood-grain pattern as occurs on cat.16. In this case, however, the motif appears to have been transferred from painted-and-varnished woodwork to bookbinder's lacquer, for it was also employed on 17th-century doors.[73]

Despite these parallels between later examples, it is clear that bookbinder's lacquer developed as an independent tradition in the late 15th century, almost certainly at Sultan Husayn Mirza's court in Herat, and that, despite fundamental technical differences, this new art form was inspired by two styles of Chinese lacquer, black-and-gold *qiangjin* wares and the polychrome *tianqi.* Gold-on-black illumination remained a component of lacquer decoration until the 20th century, and, once it had incorporated figural painting early in the 16th century, polychrome lacquer was equally long-lived. Important changes took place at the end of the 17th century, but there can be no denying that, however different they may appear, the lacquer wares of the 18th and 19th centuries had their roots in these late Timurid and early Safavid innovations.



6 detail of outer cover decorated in imitation of *tianqi* lacquer

of execution or coherence of design. This may have been because they were imitations of Herat lacquer bindings by local craftsmen, rather than the work of Herat-trained emigrants. The importance of the Herat school during this period is confirmed by the fact that the so-called *Dīvān-i Ḥusaynī* style of manuscript painting was also diffused to these centres,[63] and it is worth noting that several of the Herat lacquer bindings enclosed manuscripts illustrated in this style.[64]

On occasion the gold-on-black lacquer bindings produced in other centres were very fine, as in the case of the magnificent covers of a *ḥadīth* manuscript prepared for a son of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent about 1540.[65] In fact, it is not impossible that non-figural gold-on-black lacquer bindings found continuing favour at the Ottoman court, while among the Safavids, who were less concerned about compositions that included human figures, the gold-on-black type was soon eclipsed by polychrome figural bindings.

*Pseudo-*tianqi *lacquer*

In China in the early 15th century the black-and-gold aesthetic of *qiangjin* lacquer was varied by the introduction of other colours, both for the ground and for areas of inlay. This new polychrome type, known as *tianqi*, was in its turn imitated by the binder of the *Hasht Bihisht* manuscript of 1496–7, and polychrome motifs outlined in gold against a dark ground became the defining feature of a type of lacquer binding produced in the 16th century (cat.5, for example). Soon, though, this pseudo-*tianqi* style was varied by the inclusion of figures executed in line and colour, in the manner of Iranian miniatures, and the gold-outline work was restricted to the background motifs. At the same time, colours other than black began to be used for the background.

The *tianqi* technique was effected in two ways. In the 'dry' method the background lacquer was allowed to set; parts of the surface were cut away, and the depressions filled with lacquer of another colour; and, when dry, the surface was polished and the outlines of the design were incised and filled with gold. In 'wet' *tianqi* a similar effect was obtained by inserting wafers of lacquer of different colours into the final layer of lacquer on the body while it was still wet.[66] The earliest literary reference to *tianqi*, in the *Ying zong shi lu*, can be dated to 1435 and is nearly contemporary with the events it describes. It concerns the craftsman Yang Xuan, to whom the invention of this type of lacquer is attributed: 'In the Xuande period [1426–35] for the first time men were sent to Japan and to them was transmitted the *nijinhuaqi* ['lacquer painted with gold dust'] method to bring back to China. Xuan then learnt it and moreover made his own contribution by combining five colours, inlaid mother-of-pearl and gold, unlike the old method, which used only gold.'[67] Very few pieces of Chinese *tianqi* survive from the 15th century, and none incorporates the mother-of-pearl inlay mentioned in this passage. Of the three examples known to Sir Harry Garner, one is a cabinet in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which is decorated with imperial dragons and phoenixes in black, gold, yellow, orange, brown, two shades of green and three of red, and which he dated to the early part of the century.[68] In this context the polychrome pseudo-*tianqi* decoration of the *Hasht Bihisht* binding is of interest, for the maker created a sparkling red colour by applying tinted varnish over mother-of-pearl inlay, which can be seen where the red varnish has chipped away.[69]

A mature use of this pseudo-*tianqi* style of decoration can be seen on cat.5, which was painted in a similar range of colours to the cabinet in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Certain experimental elements, such as the sparkling red varnish, were abandoned, and fantastic landscapes populated by a variety of Sino-Islamic beasts were used to fill the whole of the three external surfaces, whereas on the *Hasht Bihisht* binding they had been confined to the centre-and-corner elements. However, on a similar binding in the British Library, on a manuscript dated 1545–56,[70] the animals were executed in the line-and-colour technique of Iranian manuscript illustration, and the *tianqi*-derived gold-outline style was

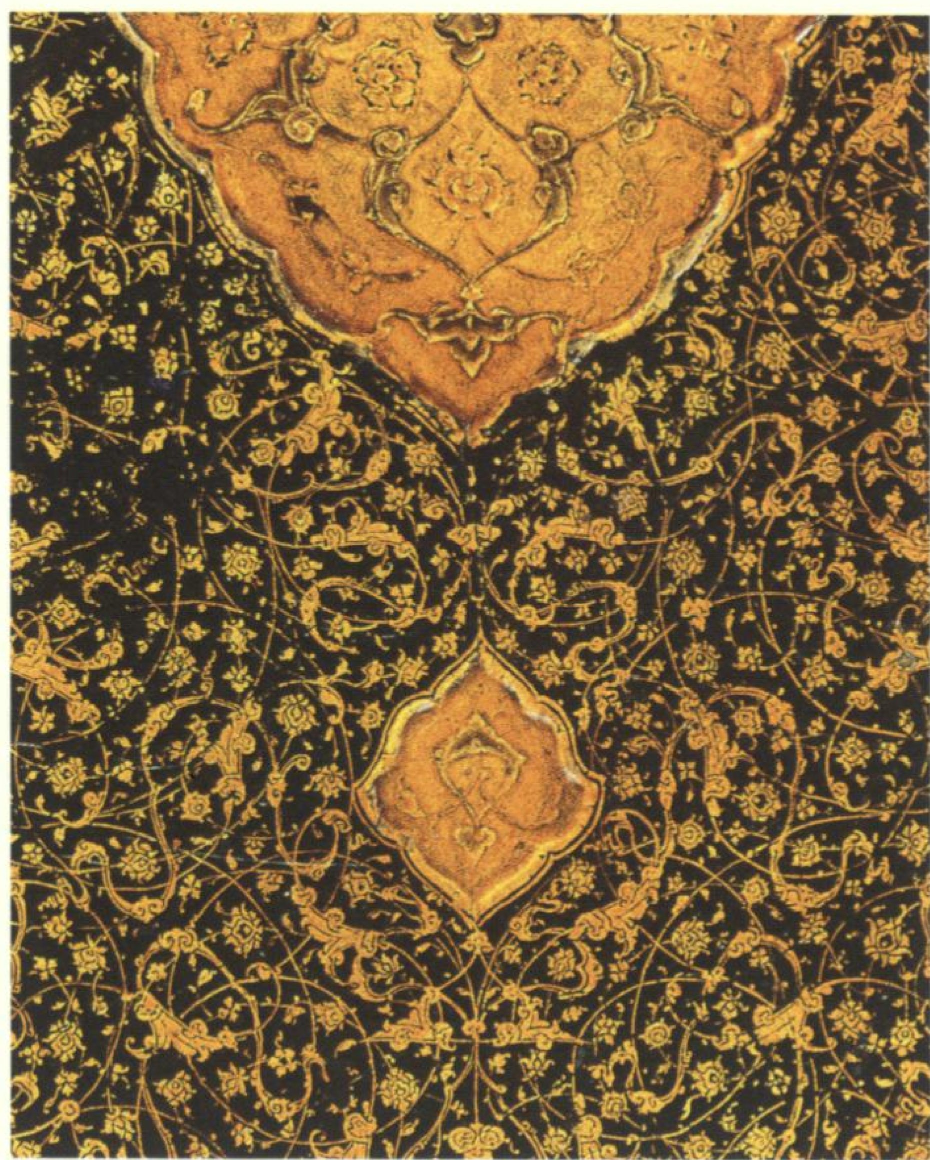
scale, a different drawing technique was employed: the larger elements – such as the Chinese clouds in the centre- and corner-pieces, and the pheasants and ducks perched in the scrollwork of the main field – were modelled in one of two tones of gold on the black ground, while the smaller, floral motifs were drawn in a stencil-like manner, so that each individual component was separate. Related scrollwork was employed on a contemporary binding in the Khalili Collection, cat.1 below, and a fifth binding, attached to a copy of the *Maṣnavī-i maʿnavī* of Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi made in Herat in 1483 for Sultan Husayn Mirza,[57] is decorated with a minuscule pattern of lotus scrolls drawn in the stencil-like manner, though the dominant feature of the decoration is a set of gilt countersunk panels with pressure-moulded ornament.

The combination of a gold-on-black lacquer ground with gilt recessed areas enjoyed a brief period of popularity, to judge by cat.2 and other examples, whose lacquer decoration is in the minuscule style of the Husayni and *Maṣnavī* bindings,[58] but it seems to have gone out of use by the mid-16th century. Gold-on-black decoration continued to be employed on lacquer bindings intermittently until the 19th century (cat.114, for example), although the style of drawing varied, and the delicacy of the two techniques seen on the four late Timurid bindings was never repeated after the mid-16th century. Mother-of-pearl inlay also seems to have been abandoned at an early stage, although powdered mother-of-pearl, or imitations of it, was an important element in the so-called *marqash* decoration of later lacquer wares.

Bookbinder's lacquer of the 16th and 17th centuries certainly owed a debt to the Herat tradition in terms of technique and in aspects of its decoration, as is shown by a comparison with the bindings mentioned above. Firstly, the Herat bindings had a black ground, and a majority of the later examples had a solid, often black, ground for the main design. Secondly, the Husayni binding and cat.1 have bands of a repeating Chinese cloud pattern in black on gold, the reverse colouring of the main field, and in later centuries black-on-gold bands of this type regularly framed the main field of figural bindings and the centre-and-corner composition of non-figural bindings.[59] Thirdly, the centre-and-corner elements of the *Hasht Bihisht* binding contain polychrome motifs outlined in gold, and the design of figural bindings of the 16th and 17th centuries generally included subsidiary motifs executed in the same manner. The one major feature of later lacquer bindings that does not occur on the early Herat group is the use of human figures executed in the manner of miniature paintings, and their inclusion was probably a development of the early years of the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524–1576).

The Herat bindings of Sultan Husayn Mirza's reign have been seen as part of a radical change in Timurid design, and parallels have been drawn with the Ardabil carpets, which were made just over 40 years later, as the threefold pattern in the centre- and corner-pieces of the Husayni binding is very close to the design in the central figure on the carpets.[60] The successful handling of the complex pattern on the book covers is the more remarkable, however, as it was executed in only one colour.[61] The close relationship between the gold-on-black work of the Herat bindings and some contemporary illumination can also be demonstrated. For example, the illumination of another copy of the *Dīvān* of Husayni, made in 1485,[62] includes diminutive gold lotus scrolls of the same type as appear in the main field of the Husayni binding of 1492. But again the greater sophistication of the work on the binding is striking: the motifs stand out more clearly against the black ground of the lacquer than they do against the natural colour of the paper, and the illusion of depth obtained by running one layer of scrollwork over another and placing birds in the upper layer is entirely absent from the published example of the illumination. It is clear from this that the lacquer bindings of late 15th-century Herat were far from being the marginal products of a court atelier, for they bear some of the best work produced there.

The gold-on-black lacquer bindings produced in centres such as Tabriz and Istanbul during the 16th century (cat.3 and 4, for example) do not necessarily show the same quality


2 detail of outer cover decorated in imitation of *qiangjin* lacquer

eight pounds of ground sandarac and one pound of colophony (*pegola spagna*) were added, and the vessel was returned to the fire for the mixture to boil until the sandarac was completely dissolved.[44] Towards the end of the century the painter Sadiq Beg (d. 1609 or 1610), writing under the pen-name Sadiqi, included a recipe for *rawghan-i kamān* in his technical treatise on the art of painting,[45] but he advocated melting the sandarac first and then adding an equal quantity of linseed oil, and he makes no mention of colophony. In 1684 Jean de Thévenot published an account of 'a most excellent Varnish' used by Iranian painters: mixed from sandarac and linseed oil, and reduced to the consistency of an unguent, it was dissolved with naphtha or alcohol when required for use.[46]

The collections of the Topkapı Palace Museum contain 61 composite bows from Iran, many with decoration in a style similar to contemporary bookbinder's lacquer, including gold-on-black designs:[47] they must once have matched Jean Chardin's description of such bows as painted and varnished 'so admirably well that one may see one's self in those Bows, and the colour of them is as bright as possible'.[48] Although the earliest dated example of these bows is from 1548, it seems reasonable to assume that bows with similar painted-and-varnished decoration were being produced for the Timurid court in Herat in the last quarter of the 15th century and that some bore gold-on-black designs. The transfer of the technique to bookbindings perhaps first occurred in Sultan Husayn Mirza's court scriptorium. For this institution, which exercized control of all aspects of court decorative arts,[49] was under the direction of Mirak Naqqash, a bow-maker and an illuminator by training.[50] According to Dust Muhammad, writing in 1544,[51] 'Amir Ruhallah, commonly known as Mirak Naqqash, was born in Herat, into a family of *sayyids* [descendants of the Prophet] whose trade was bow-making. At first he occupied himself with memorizing and reciting the Word of the Omniscient King [*i.e.* the Qur'an] and with training as a scribe. After the death of his father he turned his hand to working as a copyist, and, as he came from a line of bow-makers, he practised that trade, too. Later he entered the service of Mawlana Valiallah and took up outline work and goldwork. But he tired of these, too, and took a fancy to figure painting, in which craft he was unrivalled. During the reign of the late emperor Sultan Husayn Mirza he was afforded the protection [of his sovereign], and among the posts entrusted to him was that of curator of the prince's books [*kitābdārī-yi khāṣṣah*].'[52]

Lacquer bindings from Herat

A marked feature of the early Herat school of lacquer bookbindings is the plethora of decorative styles employed in a short period. Gold-on-black lacquer decoration plays an important role on several bindings datable to between 1478 and 1497, but the motifs were executed in a variety of styles, and three examples include other types of decoration. The earliest, attached to a copy of the *Lama'āt* of 'Iraqi made at Herat in 1478 by Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi,[53] is decorated in a similar manner to the lacquer binding made for Mehmed II in that the motifs were executed in outline and with some modelling; in this case, however, the technique does not reproduce so closely the effect of the incised, gold-filled lines used to build up the design on the *qiangjin* sutra boxes.[54] The same type of work appears on the latest of the bindings, which is attached to a copy of the *Hasht Bihisht* of Amir Khusraw Dihlavi made for Muhsin Muhammad Mirza, a son of Sultan Husayn Mirza, and produced, also by Sultan 'Ali Mashhadi, in 1496–7.[55] But on the *Hasht Bihisht* binding the centre-and-corner elements have polychrome figural designs in which gold outlines and mother-of-pearl inlay play an important role. As we shall see, this type of polychrome decoration was derived from the Chinese wares known as *tianqi* ('filled-in lacquer') rather than from *qiangjin*.

A third binding is on a copy of the *Dīvān* of Husayni – the poems of Sultan Husayn Mirza himself in Chaghatay Turkish – that was made in Herat in 1492.[56] It bears dense scrollwork designs set with miniaturized motifs, and, in order to achieve this reduction in

Fig.3
Leather binding with painted-and-varnished decoration, made for Sultan Mehmed II, Istanbul, 1468 or soon after;
27.1 cm high, 16.7 cm wide, excluding flap.
Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Library, MS.A.1672; after Raby & Tanındı 1993, no.18, p.155

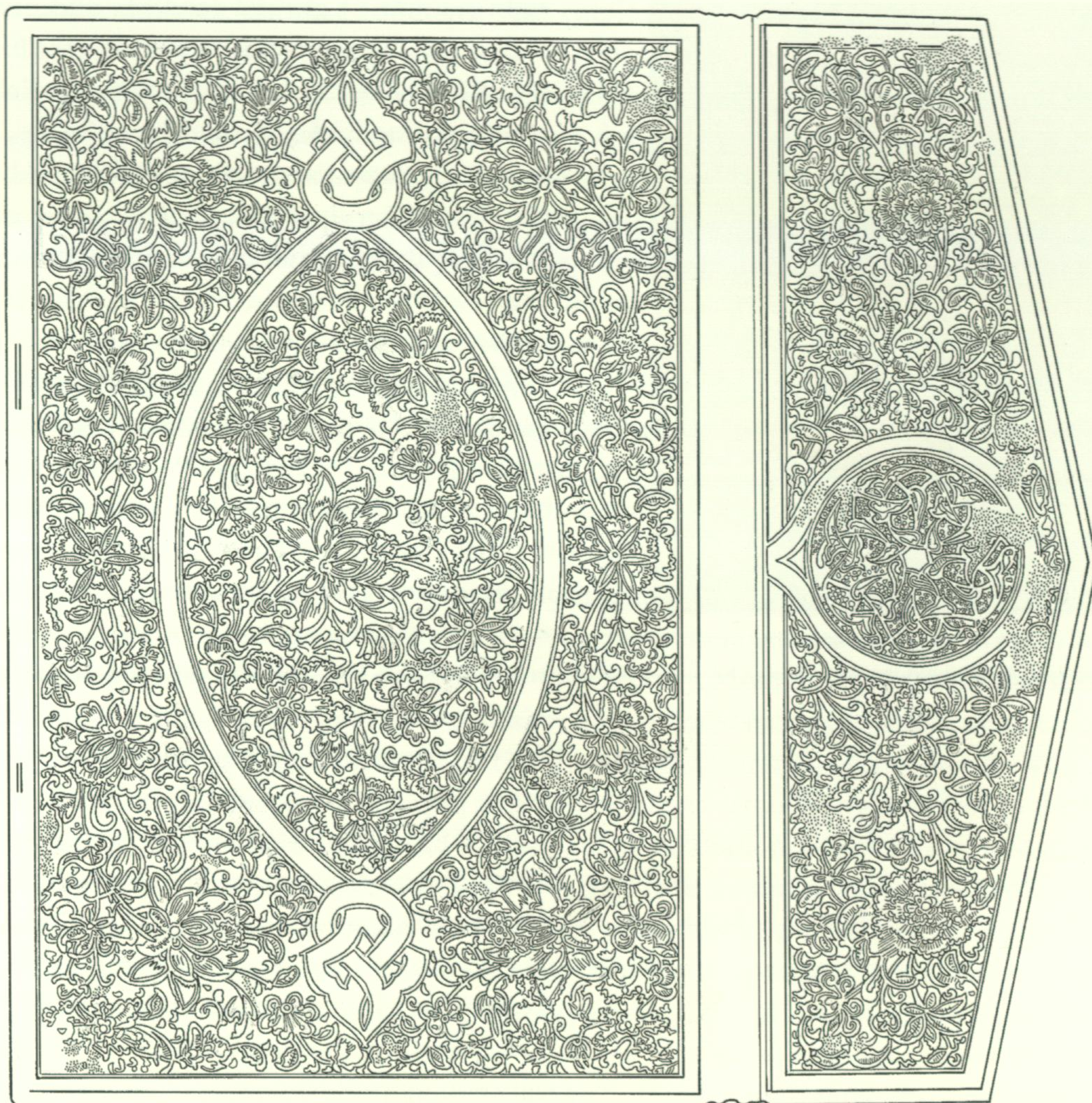


Fig.3

that the gold-on-black aesthetic derived from *qiangjin* lacquer had been successfully integrated into the Timurid repertory by the late 15th century. Such maturity might suggest that gold-on-black bookbinder's lacquer had been produced over a long period, but it is also possible that gold-on-black lacquer decoration was transferred to the bindings from another source.

If bookbinding was not the first craft in which gold-on-black decoration was employed in Herat, a hint as to its origin is provided by the name of the varnish used, *rawghan-i kamān*, or 'bow gloss'. Rather remarkably, Mirak Naqqash, a constant companion of Sultan Husayn Mirza and the head of his scriptorium,[41] was a bow-maker by training.

The lacquer bow and recipes for lacquer

The type of bow made in Iran, 'the most valued of all the East', according to the Huguenot jeweller Jean Chardin,[42] had a composite hardwood core, with strips of horn glued to the belly and sinew glued to the back. The body of the bow was covered with birch bark, which could be coated with layers of a sandarac-based varnish – the *rawghan-i kamān* that formed such an essential component of bookbinder's lacquer.[43]

Recipes for the varnish used on bows, bookbindings and related artefacts can be found in Western and Islamic sources of the 16th and 17th centuries. They differ considerably in detail, but they all include the same basic ingredients, linseed oil and gum sandarac. For example, a detailed recipe for the varnish the Turks used on their bows was published in 1526 by Leonardo Fioravanti, who specified that eight pounds of linseed oil should be boiled in a copper vessel until a feather was singed on contact. The oil was then cooled,

decoration being sent there as imperial gifts in the Yongle period (1403–1424),[35] and it was this reign which saw the establishment of peaceful contacts between the Chinese and the Timurids of Samarqand and Herat following the death of Timur in 1405.[36] Although no *qiangjin* sutra boxes of the Ming period survive, such boxes may have been among the imperial gifts sent to the Timurids at this time.

The Ottomans, in contrast to the Timurids, had no diplomatic contacts with the Ming emperors and must have acquired any Chinese lacquerware by commercial transactions, as second-hand diplomatic gifts, or as loot. That they did own items of *qiangjin* decorated in a very similar fashion to the sutra boxes is proved by a lacquer binding made for Sultan Mehmed II in the late 1460s. It has so many features in common with the sutra boxes that these are unlikely to have been transmitted indirectly.

The binding (fig.3) is attached to a manuscript on rhetoric, the copying of which was completed in November 1468. The outer covers and the envelope flap have been painted with gold-on-black designs on a leather-covered pasteboard base, and then varnished. Each surface is treated as a separate composition surrounded by a border, which is the norm in Islamic bookbindings, but the type of border chosen – a black band defined by gold fillets – is very similar to that on the sutra boxes. A similar band was used to define the centre-pieces, but in this case there was a single fillet on the outside and a double fillet on the inside, which exactly parallels the bands that define the ogival compartments on at least three of the sutra boxes.[37] On the binding, loose, rotating scrollwork set with leaves and lotus blossoms fills the spandrels, and the position of the largest lotus flowers is identical to that of the largest peony blossoms on the sutra boxes.[38] Indeed, the scaling of the floral motifs in relation to the size of the field, the overall density of the ornament, and some of the traits of the drawing technique mirror those on the sutra boxes to a remarkable degree.

The form of the book covers is typically Islamic and has no connection with any Chinese prototype, the lacquer technique of the binding had no connection with Chinese lacquer, and many of the motifs are derived from the Ottoman court style of the period.[39] Nevertheless, the connection between the sutra boxes and the binding is clear, for the co-incidences in details are reinforced by the overall similarities in terms of, first, a superficial glossiness, second, the gold-on-black colour scheme of the exteriors and, third, the use of a bright burgundy leather for the doublures, for the startling colour contrast they make with the gold-and-black exterior is precisely that found on the boxes.

The manner in which the aesthetic principles of *qiangjin* lacquer were adapted to Islamic taste in this case echoes the relationship between the earliest Iznik pottery, produced in the 1470s, and Chinese blue-and-white porcelain.[40] In the first place, the fritware (or stonepaste) body of the Iznik ceramics is a pastiche of the porcelain body of the Chinese production, just as the combination of varnish, paint, leather and pasteboard employed in the binding is a pastiche of *qiangjin* lacquer. Secondly, early Iznik pieces were primarily dependent for their forms on Ottoman precious metalwork, not on those of Chinese porcelain, just as the form of the lacquer binding is purely Islamic. Thirdly, the motifs used in the decoration of the earliest phase of Iznik pottery were largely drawn from the contemporary Ottoman repertory rather than Chinese sources, just as Ottoman motifs were used on the lacquer binding. Finally, the colour scheme of the earliest Iznik fritware was drawn from Chinese white-on-blue porcelain of the Yuan period, just as the colour scheme of the binding is seen on Yuan sutra boxes, and presumably also on *qiangjin* artefacts of the early Ming period.

No other 15th-century examples of such pseudo-*qiangjin* lacquer, using leather-covered boards, are known. But in the last quarter of the century several lacquer bindings made in a different technique, in which the decoration was applied directly to the papier-mâché boards, without the intervening layer of leather, were produced in Herat, and these were also decorated predominantly in gold on black. The sophistication of their designs indicates

example, three-quarters of the size of the sutra box in the Komyo-bo near Hiroshima, but the proportions are identical, for both are 1.6 times as long as they are high, and 1.8 times as long as they are wide.[31] On the Komyo-bo box the two main sides are decorated with a pair of flying peacocks set inside an ogival compartment, surrounded by ten symmetrically arranged peonies.[32] This composition is typical of the series, although the type of bird varies and is sometimes replaced by Buddhist motifs. On the lid of one box, however, the ogival compartment is occupied by a single dragon,[33] which may be compared with the dragon on the lid of Ulughbeg's sandalwood casket, while a parallel can also be drawn between the red silk with a silver pattern that was used to line the Ulughbeg casket and the red lacquer interiors of the *qiangjin* wares.[34]

The five-clawed feet of the dragon on the Chinese box indicate that the object was made under imperial supervision, and an inscription on one of the sutra boxes shows that they were sent to Japan before 1358. There are references to lacquer furniture with *qiangjin*

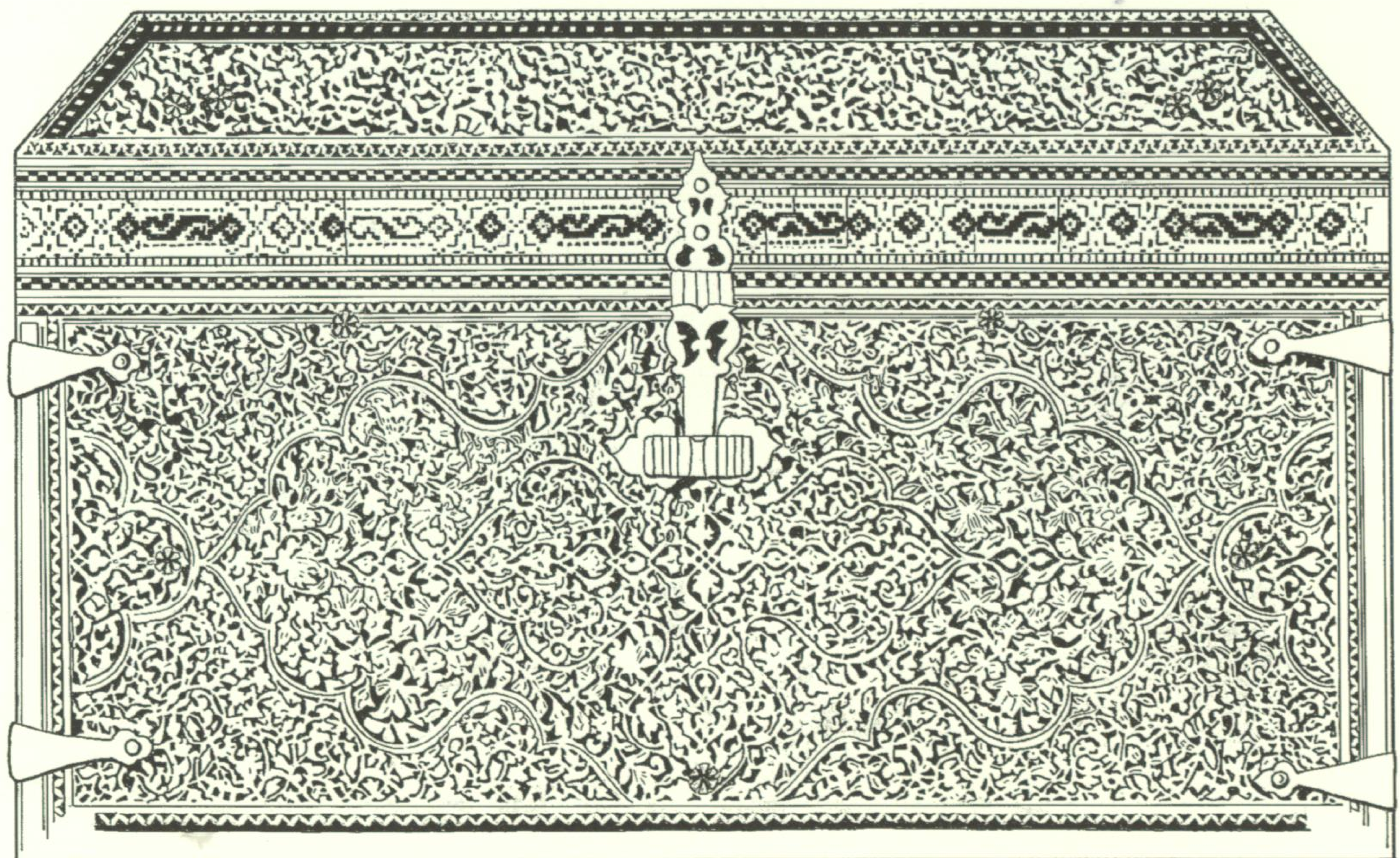


Fig.1

Fig.1
Casket of carved sandalwood made for Ulughbeg Mirza, Herat, before 1449; 31.2 cm long, 19.5 cm high. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum, inv. no.2/1846; after Arseven, no date, pl.11

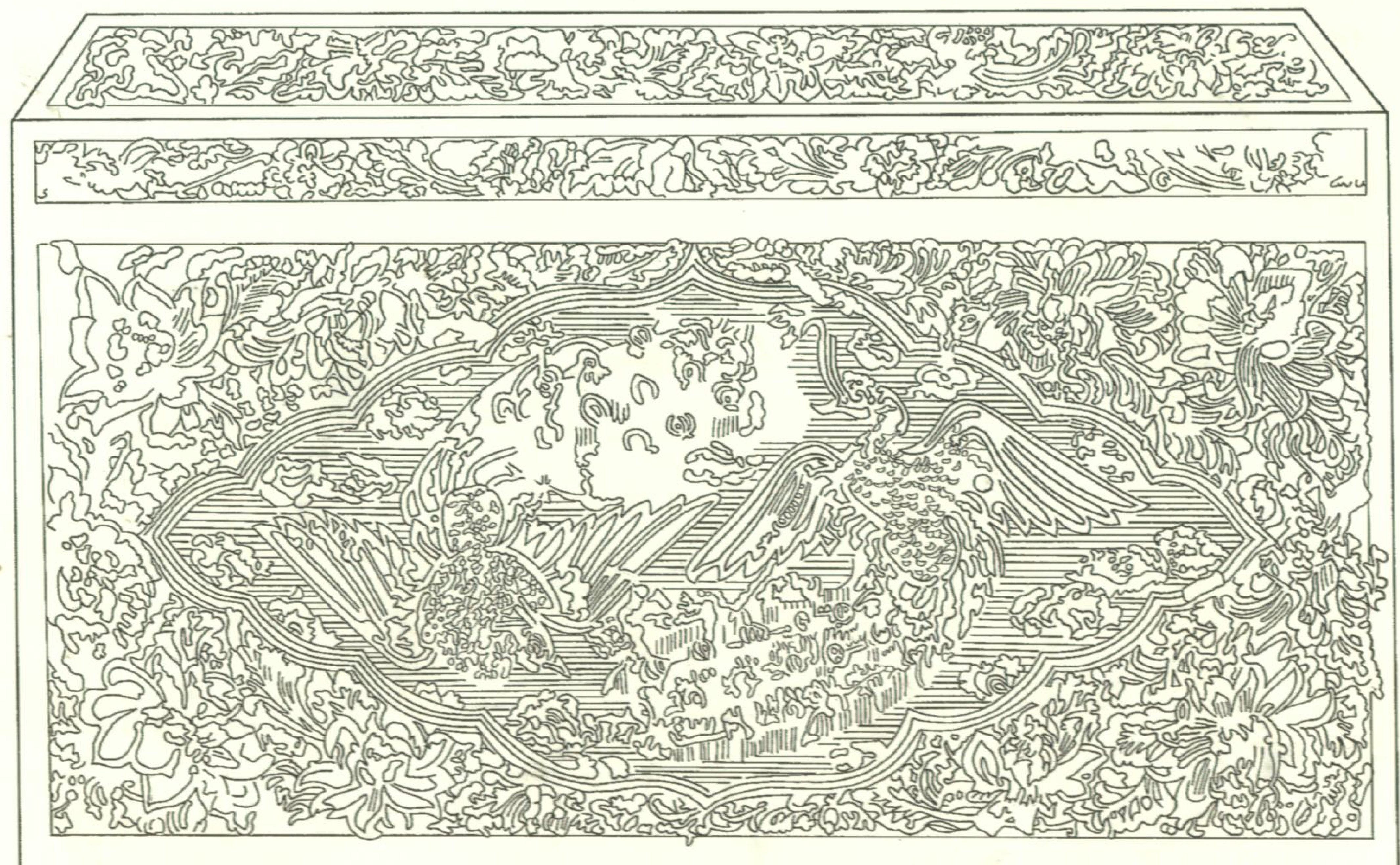


Fig.2

Fig.2
Sutra box of *qiangjin* lacquer made for the Yuan court, Hangzhou, *circa* 1315; 39.8 cm long, 25.3 cm high. Komyo-bo, near Hiroshima; after Figgess 1966, pl.29(b)

used for architectural decoration in the late 13th century, as it had been in earlier periods,[16] and contemporary examples survive in the great mosque of Afyon (1273), for example, and in the Eşrefoğlu mosque in Beyşehir (1297).[17] It may be, then, that the painted-and-varnished decoration on the Qur'an stand was an adjunct to the use of painted woodwork for architectural decoration, in which a layer of varnish was applied over the painted designs in order to protect them and to enhance their brilliance.[18] Bookbinder's lacquer, on the other hand, was originally a development of the art of bookbinding. Even if technical analyses eventually demonstrate that there was some continuity between the woodwork and papier-mâché wares, the term bookbinder's lacquer will still serve to identify an innovation at a specific point in time, from which we can trace an uninterrupted tradition that lasted into the 20th century.

The innovation in question appears to have been prompted by Chinese lacquer wares, which were imported into the Middle East well before 1450. This is documented by miniature paintings,[19] and by historical sources such as the *Khiṭaṭ* of al-Maqrizi (d. 1442), where the Egyptian historian noted that the daughters of rich Cairenes had once received sets of seven vessels as part of their dowry; each vessel was of a different material – silver, copper inlaid with gold and silver, tinned copper, varnished wood (*khashab madhūn*), Chinese porcelain (*ṣīnī*), crystal and *kadāhī*. This last term clearly refers to Far Eastern lacquer, as al-Maqrizi defined it as 'wares made of varnished board (*waraq madhūn*) that are brought from China'.[20] The Chinese porcelains imported into the Middle East are known to have inspired local imitations that copied the external appearance but differed substantially in their materials,[21] and the lacquer wares also served as models for locally produced artefacts well before the appearance of the Herat bindings,[22] to judge by a sandalwood casket made for the Timurid prince Ulughbeg Mirza (d. 1449),[23] and a binding made for the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (d. 1481).[24] This relationship is clear from the number of features that the casket and the binding share with a group of lacquer sutra boxes made in China in the early 14th century.

Parallels with qiangjin *lacquer*

The sandalwood casket (fig. 1), which has been ranked 'among the finest examples of wood-carving in existence', is associated with Ulughbeg in an inscription arranged in two cartouches on the top of the lid, one on either side of the writhing dragon that forms the central motif. In its imagery – including the dragon, which is ultimately of Chinese origin – the casket is typical of Timurid decorative arts,[25] as is the use of wood-and-ivory marquetry bands, which can be found on the doors to Timur's mausoleum in Samarqand, the Gur-i Mir.[26] Direct and contemporary Chinese influence from carved red lacquer of the early Ming period may account for the use of the tan-coloured wood,[27] and there is an indisputable Chinese influence in form, for the Ulughbeg casket relates closely to six Chinese lacquer sutra boxes made in Hangzhou in about 1315 (fig. 2).[28]

These boxes, now preserved in temples in Japan, are the most celebrated examples of a type of lacquer known as *qiangjin* ('incised gold'). In this technique the wooden body of the object was coated with lacquer, black on the exterior and red on the interior;[29] a design was etched into the black lacquer, and the incisions were dressed with a mixture of lacquer and yellow orpiment; gold leaf was then pressed into them, and the surplus wiped away.[30]

The lacquer sutra boxes and the Ulughbeg casket have the same shape: a rectangular body and a flat-topped lid with bevelled sides. On the sutra boxes all the decorated surfaces bear independent panels of *qiangjin* decoration, each framed by a plain black band. On the Ulughbeg casket the vertical facets of the lid are decorated with marquetry, but the other surfaces are decorated with independent panels of relief carving, each framed by a band of marquetry.

The Ulughbeg casket is not only the same shape as all six Chinese boxes, it is of roughly the same size as five of them. The proportions also point to a Chinese model. It is, for

many students of bookbinder's lacquer of later periods.[5] But at an early stage in the history of the subject disputes arose over basic points of reference: Emil Gratzl, for example, denied that any lacquer bindings were produced before 1525.[6] With time disagreement has increased, and a diverse range of views is current as to what is or is not Islamic lacquer and whether we can use the term at all in the context of Islamic art. This diversity of opinion is illustrated by the nine essays on the subject published in the wake of the Percival David Foundation's colloquy on Lacquerwork in Asia and Beyond, held in London in 1981.[7] In these essays four schools of thought may be detected, two of which are moderate proponents of the two views of Islamic lacquer set out above. In their papers B.W. Robinson, David James and Mark Zebrowski used the term lacquer in referring to varnished papier-mâché items produced between the late 15th century and the 19th century and decorated with illuminated designs or miniature paintings; in other words, they confined their use of the term lacquer to bookbinder's lacquer. The second school, exemplified by the contributions of Dorothea Duda and Nurhan Atasoy, extended the term to cover painted-and-varnished woodwork of all types, from mosque ceilings to small vessels.

The third, and most idiosyncratic, position was taken up by Muhammad Yousef Kiani, who divided the history of Iranian lacquer into two periods, with the rise of the Safavids around AD 1500 as the dividing line.[8] Kiani was concerned with the earlier period, when 'the art of woodwork was accompanied by the use of colour and lacquer painting'.[9] He described 'lacquer painting' in terms of the use of *lāk*. This Persian term, like the English word lacquer, is derived from the Hindi *lākh* ('lac') and refers to the two commercial products obtained from the exudations of the lac insect, that is, the resin known as shellac and the red dyestuff known as lake.[10] Kiani cited two finds from the excavations at Nishapur as the oldest known examples of Iranian lacquer. One, a fragment of a wooden box, he dated to the late 10th or early 11th century AD, and the other, a tiny bone figurine, he dated to the late 9th century or the 10th; their status as lacquer appears to have rested solely on the fact that they are both painted red. He also devoted considerable space to a small wooden vessel with polychrome decoration, which he had excavated at Ribat-i Sharaf in 1976 and which he dated to the late 11th century or the 12th. In conclusion, he referred to the carved and painted cenotaph of AD 1479 in the shrine of the Imamzadah Salih near Sari. From this it appears that Kiani defined lacquer as (a) any object painted with a red pigment, which he presumed to be lake, and (b) wooden objects that have been carved, painted and coated with a varnish, or *lāk*. Because of this etymological approach Kiani dismissed the techniques employed after 1500, for they did not involve the use of 'real lacquer', by which he meant lac![11]

The fourth school is represented by Géza Fehérvári, Oliver Watson and Ernst Grube. Like the second school, its members did not distinguish between bookbinder's lacquer and painted-and-varnished woodwork, but in addition they rejected the description of either as 'lacquer', a term they wished to confine to objects made from the sap of *Rhus verniciflua* and the other lacquer trees of the Far East.[12] However, as the word lacquer is derived from an Indian term referring to a quite different substance (the *lākh* mentioned by Kiani) and is freely applied in English to a wide range of varnishes and varnished wares,[13] it seems churlish to forbid its use in an Islamic context. In addition, the members of this 'rejectionist' school made no attempt to explain why pasteboard forms the base for so much Islamic painted-and-varnished ware.

An object often included as proof of a longstanding tradition of 'Islamic lacquer' is a wooden reading stand (*raḥlah*) made in AH 678 (AD 1279–80) for the tomb of Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi in Konya.[14] The stand has fine painted-and-varnished decoration on the flat upper surfaces, where the book was laid for reading, and the motifs in the design, which were outlined in black and executed mostly in gold on red and blue grounds, include a double-headed eagle surrounded by 14 lions.[15] Painted-and-varnished woodwork was also

Bookbinder's lacquer. An introduction

The term Islamic lacquer is most closely associated with Iranian pen boxes with painted and varnished decoration over a papier-mâché base, of which the Khalili Collection contains a large and representative sample. These artefacts were the personal possessions of emirs and viziers, merchants and scribes, poets and painters, and were treasured by their owners as tokens of their literacy and of their consequent honoured status.[1] The pen boxes were in fact only one part of a much larger production that included bookbindings, mirror cases, caskets of various types, spectacle cases and even playing cards. The majority of these items date from the Qajar period (1779–1924), but the Collection also includes many earlier items, and together they provide an opportunity to trace the development of Islamic lacquer over a period of more than 400 years. However, the term Islamic lacquer has been the subject of some controversy, and it is necessary to make clear how it has been used in this catalogue.

Origins and definitions

As we shall see, one school of thought has defined Islamic lacquer in terms of wares with a papier-mâché base and has explained the lack of examples made before 1450 as the result of the fragility of the materials. A second school has included these objects in a long-lived tradition of Islamic lacquerware that comprises work executed on bases made of other materials, principally wood; to this school the lack of any papier-mâché objects made before the second half of the 15th century is not a problem.

A somewhat different argument is presented here: that the papier-mâché wares should indeed be treated as a separate category with a separate history, and that this history began only in the later 15th century, when a series of lacquer bookbindings was produced in Herat, at the court of the Timurid ruler Sultan Husayn Mirza. These bindings are the earliest examples of such lacquer to survive, and they are the source of many features that were to remain constant in the subsequent history of the art form. One of these was the type of papier mâché used as a base both for the early bindings and for the various wares produced in later periods. Consisting of sheets of paper pasted one on another, this material was characteristic of the binder's craft, in which context it is usually referred to as pasteboard.[2] In view of these connections, it seems appropriate to distinguish these papier-mâché wares by the name 'bookbinder's lacquer'.

Bookbinder's lacquer was decorated with miniature paintings or illumination and coated with a lustrous varnish known in Persian as *rawghan-i kamān* ('bow gloss'). The varnish was not employed solely to protect the paintwork but was integrated into the decoration; the role it plays in the overall aesthetic effect is so important that without its rich glow the objects would have been mere painted board. In many cases the brilliance of the objects was enhanced by gold and by other elements, such as a suspension of the scintillating mineral known as *marqash*. The decoration of the earliest lacquer bookbindings was inspired by Chinese prototypes, at least in terms of the combinations of colours used (cat.1–5). But polychrome work in the Iranian style soon came to predominate (cat.6 is an early example), and the appearance of bookbinder's lacquer became quite distinct from that of its Far Eastern models. So distinct, in fact, that many commentators have denied that there is any connection. Early in the 16th century the Herat tradition of lacquer bindings was transmitted to other centres in Iran, Central Asia and Turkey, and by the end of the century the technique was also being practised in India.[3] It was about this time, too, that bookbinder's lacquer began to be employed for other forms.

Although the term 'bookbinder's lacquer' has been introduced here for the first time, the specific character of this art form, its origin in attempts to imitate some aspects of Chinese lacquer, and the role that the court of Sultan Husayn Mirza in Herat played in its initial development have been recognized by many scholars who have studied the lacquer bindings of the late 15th century.[4] A similar definition of the art form is implicit in the work of

Christopher Phillips, who was responsible for the photography. Anikst Associates prepared the designs with their usual panache, and Alison Effeny was the text editor at Azimuth Editions, where Lorna Raby supervised the production process. Wendy Keelan and Sally Chancellor provided invaluable administrative help.

I cannot conclude without acknowledging the understanding and affection shown to me by my wife, Marion, and the rest of my family while I was engrossed in another of my many enthusiasms.

Nasser D. Khalili
London, 1996

Foreword

The lacquer wares published in this catalogue stand at the core of the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, for it was my fascination with these richly decorated objects that first drew me to become a collector. From time to time my father would bring a fine lacquer pen box back to our home in Tehran, and I would wonder at the quality of the painting achieved on such reduced spaces. The artists who produced such decoration were like talented horsemen who are still able to display their prowess even when confined to a small room, rather than riding free in the countryside. When the opportunity arose, I began to collect Islamic lacquer wares on my own account, and the holdings of the Khalili Collection in this area now amount to over 500 pieces, making it the largest collection of its kind.

Not long after I began to collect Islamic lacquer I was lucky to meet B.W. Robinson, the foremost Western expert on the subject, and to discuss with him the pieces I had acquired. He encouraged me to make a study of Islamic lacquer on my own account, because of my personal enthusiasm and because he felt that a native Persian-speaker such as myself would have access to a range of written and oral sources that would elude a European or American student. It was as a result of his encouragement that I completed a doctoral dissertation on Persian lacquer at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. I owe a great personal debt to B.W. Robinson for his kindness and inspiration. I am also grateful to him for undertaking to make a descriptive inventory of my lacquer collection as I acquired it. This process, which began in 1978, has reached its fulfilment in the publication of this two-part survey.

I was equally pleased when Tim Stanley agreed to work with us. He was given the onerous task of coordinating a mass of information, and of reformulating appropriate sections of my thesis as essays. Tim has also made an outstanding contribution of his own to this book in terms of original research. This included a period of study in Istanbul, and I am grateful for the generous assistance he received from the Director of the Topkapı Palace Museum, to Dr Filiz Çağman and the staff of the Library there, to the Director of the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, and to that Museum's head of manuscripts, Dr Şule Aksoy.

In addition to the authors, two other people made a vital contribution to the successful production of this catalogue, and they must share the credit. Manijeh Bayani produced transcriptions and translations of all the inscriptions, which are an essential documentary source not only for cataloguing this collection but more generally for the history of lacquer production in Iran and beyond. In many cases she was able to provide new information that clarifies the life and work of important painters. In doing so she has complemented the enormous corpus of such information assembled by Mohammad Ali Karimzadeh Tabrizi and Adib Boroumand, both old friends of my family. In one area, that of case-maker's seals, she has broken completely new ground, and her findings are published in Part Two.

Nahla Nassar, the Deputy Curator of the Collection, worked with the authors on the arrangement of the material and the contents of the texts, helping us to bring out the main themes we wished to elaborate and adding much that was new. There were strong continuities in the history of Islamic lacquer, and as a result we have often judged it preferable to avoid strict chronological sequences. By doing so we have been able to explore one theme as it developed over a period of a century or more, before turning to another.

Other contributions to the project were made by Dr Julian Raby, the General Editor of the series, and I am grateful to him for his continuing efforts. I also wish to record my gratitude to Diane Dixson-O'Carroll, who made the drawings published here, and

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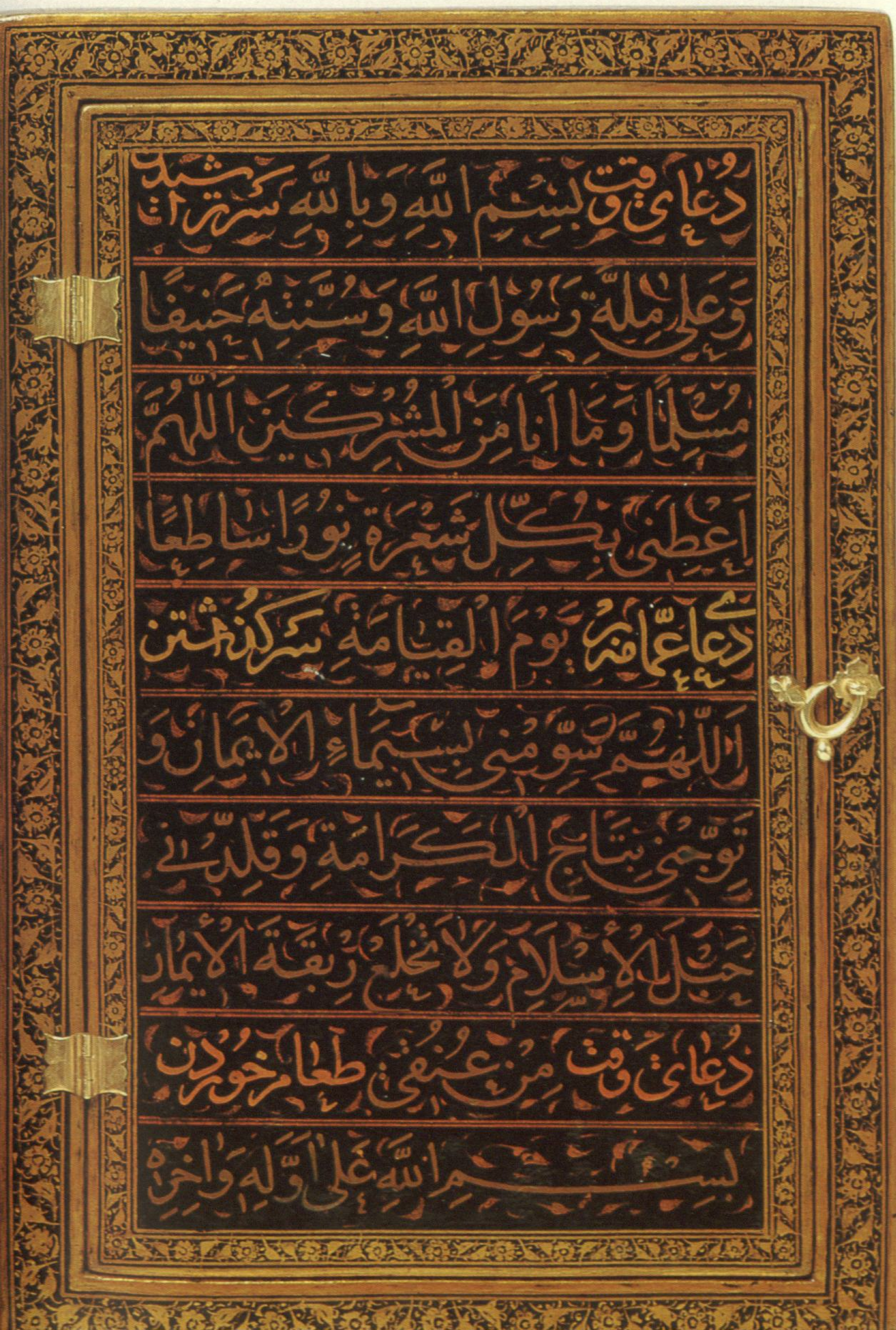
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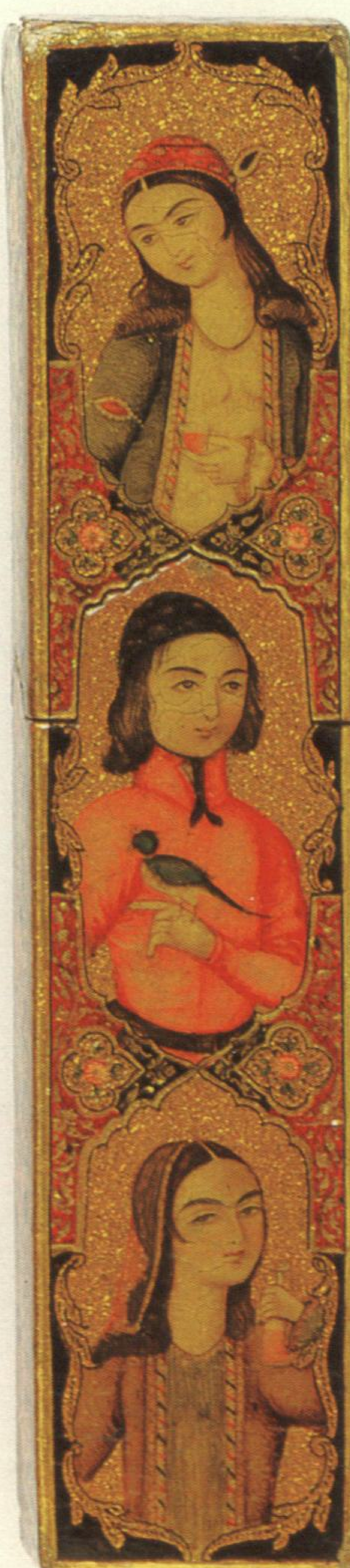
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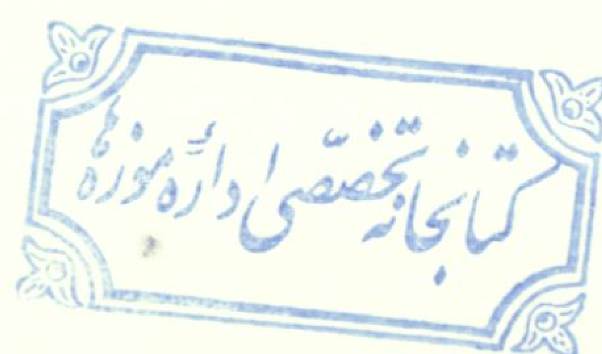




THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED PARENTS,
HADASSAH AND DANIEL KHALILI



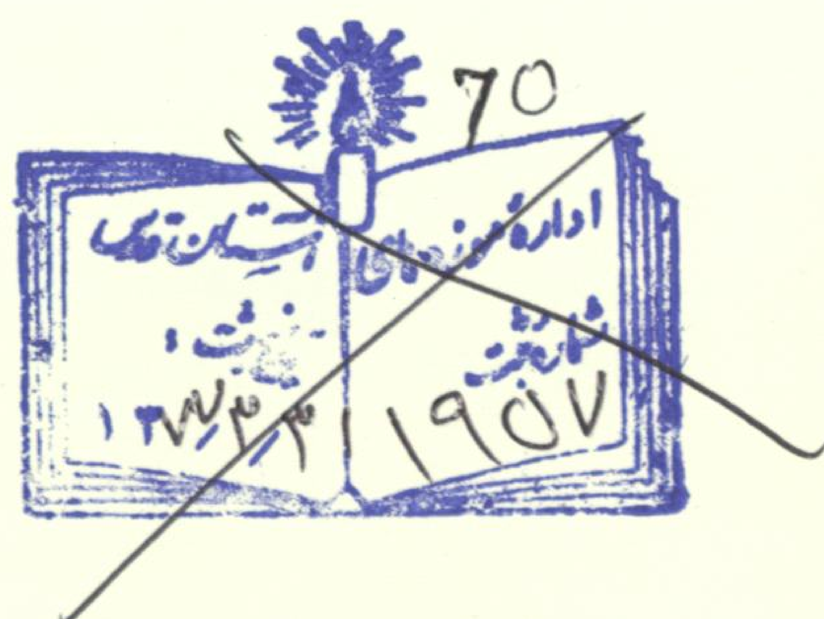
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